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**LLANELLY PARISH, BRECONSHIRE: THE IMPACT OF THE IRON
INDUSTRY ON A RURAL WELSH PARISH, 1790-1890**

By

GAVIN THOMAS EYNON, LL.B.

Submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy

Discipline of History

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ABSTRACT

Perhaps understandably, most of the research undertaken into the growth of the South Wales coal and iron industries has concentrated on the major production areas such as Merthyr Tydfil. Llanelly parish, Breconshire, is situated to the north-east, at the very extremity of this industrial area, and has been largely ignored by historians. Yet, starting in the late eighteenth century, Llanelly parish underwent a rapid development owing to the expansion of the local iron industry, only for it to decline from around the middle of the nineteenth century. This study examines the demographic, economic, and social changes which the iron industry brought to this previously agricultural area, and the extent to which communities on the margin of the ironbelt were caught up in the industrial conflicts of the time. The thesis also investigates how this relatively small industrial settlement differed, if at all, from the larger industrial centres, and attempts to assess the consequences of the failure of the local ironworks in mid-century, by comparing the experiences of communities in the parish with those communities which continued to grow. Internal to the parish, the thesis also proffers reasons as to why some settlements never developed into proper townships, whereas others, most notably the town of Brynmawr, made that transition successfully.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Aims of the Study

According to H.P.R. Finberg, of the pioneering 'Leicester School' of the early 1950s, the aim of the local historian should be to 're-enact ... the origin, growth, decline and fall of a local community'¹. This study carries out Finberg's precept, although, unlike many other local studies, the 'growth' and 'decline' of the community concerned occurred within a period of well under a hundred years. The study examines the changes brought about to a rural Welsh parish by the development and then failure of the South Wales iron industry during the nineteenth century.

The parish concerned – that of Llanelly - lies at the northeastern corner of the South Wales coalfield, and was at the periphery of the industrialised area. Though iron had been produced from the early seventeenth century at a charcoal-fired furnace in the parish, industrialisation only really came about with the coke-fired furnaces of the Clydach Ironworks (founded c.1793).

Studies of the South Wales coalfield have tended to concentrate on the larger or more centrally located communities, such as Carter and Wheatley's monograph on Merthyr Tydfil in 1851², or P.N. Jones's study of the Ogmore and Garw coal mining valleys in 1881³. As a result of this, the area around Llanelly parish has been somewhat neglected by historians and human geographers alike, although it has occasionally been referred to as part of a larger study, as for example in D.J.V. Jones's *Before Rebecca*⁴. Atkinson and Baber, in their monograph *The Growth and Decline of the South Wales Iron Industry* acknowledge that most historical study has focused on

¹ Quoted in D. Huw Owen (Ed.), *Settlement and Society in Wales*, (Cardiff, 1989), p.2

² Harold Carter and Sandra Wheatley, *Merthyr Tydfil in 1851: a Study of the Spatial Structure of a Welsh Industrial Town*, (Cardiff, 1982)

³ P.N. Jones, *Mines, Migrants and Residence in the South Wales Steamcoal Valleys: the Ogmore and Garw Valleys in 1881*, (Hull University Press, 1987)

⁴ D.J.V. Jones, *Before Rebecca: Popular Protests in Wales, 1793-1835*, (Allen Lane, 1973). For the Clydach and Llanelly area see particularly pp. 23 and 74-79

the Merthyr Tydfil area, with the result that 'the contiguous Monmouthshire works to the east played an increasingly important role in the South Wales iron trade, a fact which has not generally been fully recognised'⁵. They add that the industry's success stories have been reasonably well documented, whereas the failures have largely been ignored⁶. The Clydach Ironworks was a failure in overall terms, and that fact, plus its relatively small size and output, has led to a dearth of studies of this particular area. Even in Atkinson and Baber's study - although it is occasionally referred to - the Clydach Ironworks is not mentioned in any detail.

The aims of this study are threefold. Firstly, to examine the parish in detail, and secondly to see how, if at all, it differed from those areas which have been the subject of previous study. To take one instance, the geographic location of Llanelly parish, in particular its proximity to the English border counties, had implications which were potentially far reaching: would the area see the inflow of migrants from rural west Wales, as noted by Carter and Wheatley in Merthyr Tydfil, for example, or a greater in-migration from counties such as Hereford and Somerset? If the latter, then what were the implications of such inward migration for cultural matters, such as language or religious denominationalism?

The third aim has been to construct a picture, in so far as it is possible, of what daily life was like in an iron and coal mining settlement during the course of the last century. In order to do this, the study focuses in detail on the small coal and iron mining settlement of Llanelly Hill, which lay within the parish. This settlement was chosen because it was self-contained and small enough to be able to study in detail.

The study begins in Chapter 2 with a short introduction to the geography of the parish, and its relation to the coalfield to the south, and the agricultural lands to the north, followed by a brief historical overview of the iron industry in the parish. The first chapter of real substance is Chapter 3 on population. Of primary concern here is

⁵ M. Atkinson and C. Baber, *The Growth and Decline of the South Wales Iron Industry, 1760-1880*, (University of Wales Press, 1987), p.7

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.46

the question of how the population of the parish was affected by the establishment of the Clydach Ironworks in the parish in the 1790s, and, equally, the failure of that works in the 1860s, and its final closure in the 1870s. If the population increased, as it surely must have done, then how far was this attributable to in-migration, and where did such in-migration originate? What was the age and sex structure of the population, and how far did this conform to the balance we might expect to find in a mining community? Were there differences of composition in the populations of small communities, such as those in Llanelly parish, and the bigger irontowns of Monmouthshire, found immediately to the south, or did migratory patterns, growth of population and decline, merely mirror events in the larger centres?

Chapter 4 examines occupational structures, examining in detail the types of occupation to be found in a coal and iron mining settlement, and how this changed as the iron industry declined and was replaced by coal mining as the main form of employment. Linked to this, are questions such as how far the ironworks used female and child labour, and how the roles of women and children in heavy industry altered during the course of the century. A further point of importance in the present study is that communities in the parish remained as villages, or loosely grouped settlements, lacking any real definitive pattern or point of focus. They never became recognisable towns in the way that Merthyr Tydfil, or the north Monmouthshire irontowns did. The question then arises as to how far such small settlements supported trade and retail, or professional and service, sectors. Was there any variety of occupation in a small, somewhat isolated mining community, or did the occupational structure lack all diversity?

Chapter 5 examines housing provision, seeking to answer such questions as to what extent any population growth was accompanied by overcrowding of available accommodation. If new housing was provided to house the industrial communities, as seems inevitable, then who was it provided by, and what types of housing were provided? Did smaller communities suffer from the same problems of bad housing, poor sanitation, and so on, as encountered in larger urban or industrial areas, and, if

so, what steps were taken to combat such problems? In relation to this, was it relevant that the industrial settlements in Llanelly parish failed to develop into proper towns, and so may have lacked the civic administration necessary to implement improvements under Public Health legislation? If poor housing conditions existed, how did these affect the health of the population? Did they enjoy better health than the inhabitants of more densely crowded urban areas: how did their mortality rates, general or infant, compare with large towns? The question of health must also have been linked to occupation: is it possible to gauge how hazardous or physically harmful an occupation like mining was, by examining the age structure of the mining workforce? If so, is there any evidence that working conditions improved over the course of the century?

In Chapter 6, the religious life of the parish is examined. Important questions here are how the Established Church responded to the changes brought about by industrialisation, and was there the growth of Nonconformism associated with other parts of Wales? If so, what religious denominations were represented in the parish, what were their respective strengths, and to what, or where, did they owe their origins? Was there already a Nonconformist presence in or around the parish, or did Nonconformism arrive with the in-migration of people from other areas? Was there any tension between Nonconformist sects and the Established Church? Broader questions also need answering, such as whether religion declined in importance over the century. Did the impact of industrialisation boost organised religion, or begin a process of secularisation? What evidence is there that religion played a prominent role in people's lives, and, if there is such evidence, what effect did religion have: a controlling one, as some historians believe, or a liberating one?

Chapter 7 deals with education. It is concerned first with whether any educational provision existed prior to industrialisation. If it did, was educational provision improved or harmed by the coming of industry? Who was responsible for providing schools, and were their motives purely altruistic, or was there some other motive in attempts to educate the industrial communities? How prominent were

Sunday Schools, and works' schools, in the field of education? Did the example of Llanelly parish bear out the damning findings of the 1847 Commission on the State of Education in Wales? How regular or widespread were school enrolment and attendance – in other words, was any great value placed on education by the people at whom it was directed? In the matter of school attendance, was there any disparity between the sexes, did demands for child labour impinge upon education, and how big a difference did the introduction of compulsory elementary education make?

Closely related to religion and education was the subject of language. This is considered in Chapter 8. The important point here was the proximity of Llanelly parish to the English border, and what influence that had on the survival or use of Welsh in relation to English. Did the balance between the use of the two languages alter during the period under study, and, if so, in what way, and why? Did any immigration to the area weaken or reinforce the use of Welsh, in what should probably have been a fairly anglicised area? Is it possible to trace the impact of the related topics of education and religion on the use of language, particularly the introduction of a state system of elementary education insisting upon English as the medium of instruction, and, on the other hand, Nonconformist chapels as bastions of Welsh language and culture? How did the parish compare with areas which had undergone a more intensive industrialisation, and with areas in the Welsh speaking strongholds of north and west rural Wales? Finally, how prevalent was the use of Welsh at the time of the 1891 census, which, for the first time, collected statistical information on the use of language?

The final chapter, prior to drawing conclusions, is Chapter 9, entitled 'Politics and Protest'. It examines the extent to which the ironmaster entrepreneurs exercised control over the communities they brought into being. Did those communities conform to the open or closed types of settlement, discussed by Mills, amongst others?⁷ How far did the communities in the parish participate in the episodes of

⁷ In D.R. Mills, *Lord and Peasant in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Croom Helm, 1980)

industrial unrest, which characterised the coalfield in the post-war depression of 1816 and in the 1820s and 30s? Did the parish's location at the periphery of the coalfield isolate it from the main centres of unrest, and was the parish affected by the emergence of the Scotch Cattle in the Monmouthshire irontowns in the 1820s and 30s⁸? On the question of politics, the limitations of the franchise need to be examined. Did the industrial communities play any role in the democratic process? To what extent was the franchise on Llanelly Hill extended by successive Reform Acts, and which Act had the biggest impact? Is there any evidence as to the political affiliations of the industrial communities, if any? Did the Chartist movement gain any credence in the parish, and – an important point from the view of local history – did the parish participate in the Chartist rising of 1839, when the town of Newport was attacked?

The study ends with conclusions in Chapter 10, in which the main points to be derived from the foregoing chapters are brought together.

Source Material

In terms of primary source material, the chapters on population and occupation draw on the census returns, as, to a lesser degree, do the sections on language and education. Much of the discussion in the earlier chapters centres on a quantitative analysis of the census material supplemented by other primary sources. Later chapters such as that on 'Politics and Protest' deal more with qualitative material, for which there are rather less primary sources available.

One of the difficulties with the census is that abstracted information, such as population tables, is readily available for Llanelly parish, and for the county of Breconshire, both of which were recognised demographic units for the purposes of collecting statistical data. However, the iron and coal mining community of Llanelly Hill, on which the study focuses in particular, merely formed a part of the parish, and no separate data was compiled in respect of it alone. This means that census data for

⁸ The Scotch Cattle were a covert movement aimed at ensuring solidarity during strikes. Their methods were intimidatory and sometimes violent.

Llanelly Hill has had to be extracted directly from microfiche of the census enumerators' books. This has its own problems, such as legibility of handwriting, and carelessness or errors in the compilation of the books from householders' schedules. Added to the usual difficulties, the settlements on Llanelly Hill were loosely dispersed, and had no streets, and hence no street names or house numbers. There was thus considerable latitude in how enumerators described location: the same household might be enumerated for, say, Llamarch in 1851, but appear in Darenfelen in 1861⁹. A personal knowledge of the area has at times been of considerable help, and a field visit has been made to study the geography of the location. Reference to other source material, particularly maps and plans, also helps ensure that errors do not creep in.

Much use has been made of the reports of various Commissions of Enquiry appointed to investigate social conditions in South Wales, and of reports such as those of the Mines Inspectors and the Medical Officer of Health to the Privy Council. These reports feature more largely in qualitative discussions relating to the chapters on occupation, housing and health, and problems associated with public order. The shortcomings of this type of source include the pre-conceptions of their authors, and problems of outside observers misinterpreting what they saw. The 1847 Report on the State of Education in Wales was the culmination of a series of enquiries which had already formed pronounced views on Welsh education, and its own findings followed suit. The evidential basis for such material also needs to be considered. The 1847 report was highly critical of Nonconformism and the Welsh language, but had derived its evidence mainly from Anglicans.

Considerable caution needs to be exercised with personal reminiscences, diaries, and autobiographies. Use is made of a number of these sources in the present study, including the reminiscences of Arthur Griffiths, the Anglican incumbent of the parish between 1849-1900. These sources provide 'direct testimony from the people

⁹ These are names of settlements on Llanelly Hill.

who underwent the experience of industrialisation and urbanisation'¹⁰. On the other hand, such personal accounts were not written with the later historian in mind, and may raise more questions than they answer. The subjectivity and personal interests of the author need always to be considered.

Other sources give only a limited or incomplete coverage. For example, trade directories do not list all public houses (this is evident from a comparison between different trade directories, and with other sources) and the same may equally be true of other commercial interests. Newspapers circulating in the earlier part of the period covered a large area, and, in the normal course of events, paid little attention to a small ironworks such as those at Clydach. It was only when something significant occurred that newspapers gave any coverage to Llanelly parish.

Only a limited use is made of the parish registers because the parish was mainly Nonconformist. There is no guarantee that the section of the community which attended the parish church would be representative of the community as a whole. The registers have been referred to in examining whatever evidence they provide in the context of in-migration and occupational bias, but only in a period at the beginning of the study before the 1801 census, and prior to the foundation of any Nonconformist chapels in the parish.

There are two principal histories of the county of Breconshire, the foremost of these being *The History of the County of Brecknock*, which was written by Theophilus Jones in two volumes in 1805 and 1809, though the third edition by Lord Glanusk (1909) is perhaps of greater value as it updates Jones's original work. Then there is *The History and Biography of Brecknockshire*, by Edwin Poole, written in 1886. This is useful in that it devotes much space to the history of Nonconformism in the county. Information about Breconshire (and indirectly about Llanelly parish) at the beginning of the period under study, is available in two unpublished manuscript volumes of the Revd. Henry Thomas Payne. Though undated, these manuscripts were probably

¹⁰ Trevor Herbert and Gareth Elwyn Jones, (Eds.), *People and Protest: Wales 1815-1880*, (University of Wales Press, 1988), p.36.

written between 1801 and 1811, as Payne refers to the 1801 census. Payne's work may have been drawn on by Theophilus Jones: certainly Payne wrote in one of his volumes 'this book shamefully used by Theophilus Jones to whom I lent it for his history of Breconshire'¹¹.

Another important primary source is the Maybery collection, housed at the National Library of Wales. This large collection contains the papers of the Maybery family of Breconshire, and of the solicitors Maybery, Williams, Cobb. The predecessors of this firm were the Powell family of Brecon, who were solicitors to the Brecon & Abergavenny Canal Company and several of the most important South Wales ironmasters. More importantly for present purposes, the Powell family were partners in the Clydach Ironworks from 1803.

No poll books have been examined partly because preliminary enquiries revealed none to be extant¹² but, more importantly, the electorate in the parish was so small that it would have been unsafe to treat its voting habits, whatever they may have been, as representative of the political views of the wider community. In any event, by the time the franchise had been widened enough to make any significant difference to the parish, the Secret Ballot Act of 1872 had abolished the use of poll books.

The thesis does not encompass any detailed study of land ownership or occupation, so rate books or similar sources are not referred to. That said, sources such as conveyance plans and the Ordnance Survey, particulars of sale at auction, tithe maps and commutation agreements, have all been invaluable in illustrating settlement patterns, and in a discussion of the land occupied by the Clydach Ironworks. This latter is included as part of the introductory chapter, and is necessary to a proper understanding of the works, and hence the communities which were attached to it.

One primary source has not been traced. This is a series of local newspaper articles written by a Clydach resident in the 1890s. Extracts from these articles were

¹¹ Payne, Revd. Henry Thomas, unpublished MS, (National Library of Wales, Minor Deposits, 186)

¹² It is possible that a more extensive search may have uncovered some, but, for the reasons given, their value would probably have been limited.

drawn on by the Rector of Llanelly parish, the Revd. D. Parry-Jones, for a series of articles he contributed to *The South Wales Argus* in the early 1960s. Parry-Jones was the author of several works on his life as a clergyman, and on Welsh folklore and legend. His use of those primary sources, which I have been able to trace, show him to be a careful and balanced writer, who treated his sources judiciously. Whilst it would have been preferable to work from the original, I have had few reservations in utilising the material quoted by Parry-Jones.

Finally, where a primary source has particular shortcomings, over and above those outlined above, these are dealt with at the appropriate place in the text.

Chapter 2

The Historic and Geographic Background

The South Wales Iron Industry

Llanelly was one of the southernmost parishes in the old Welsh county of Breconshire (also referred to as Brecknockshire), and lay on the border of that county and Monmouthshire¹. Breconshire was a rural mid-Wales county, whose geology was predominantly Old Red Sandstone. Monmouthshire, on the other hand, lay on the Carboniferous strata of the South Wales coalfield, and, together with Glamorgan, would become the most heavily industrialised of Welsh counties in the nineteenth century. Industrialisation took place in two phases: firstly, the iron industry from roughly the late 1780s to the 1860s; and secondly, the coal industry from the 1860s through to the twentieth century. This study is concerned primarily with the impact of the earlier phase, and how the transition was made to the second.

The South Wales iron district lay in a twenty mile belt between Hirwaun in the west, and Blaenavon in the east. By 1796, this area produced 27.3% of British pig iron, and by 1830 that figure had risen to peak, in terms of percentage share, at 41%². In 1806, South Wales had the highest output of any British iron district, putting Shropshire in second place³. The centre of the district was the town of Merthyr Tydfil in Glamorgan, which had four major ironworks, of which the largest was Cyfarthfa. In 1796, Cyfarthfa's furnaces cast 7,204 tons of pig iron, when the average output per ironworks in Britain was 1,562 tons per year⁴. In 1806, Cyfarthfa had the highest output of any British ironworks⁵.

¹ Llanelly parish should not be confused with the town of Llanelli, in Carmarthenshire.

² M. Atkinson and C. Baber, *The Growth and Decline of the South Wales Iron Industry, 1760-1880*, (University of Wales Press, 1987), p.5.

³ E. Pawson, *The Early Industrial Revolution*, (Batsford Academic, 1979), p.72

⁴ Chris Evans, *The Labyrinth of Flames: Work and Social Conflict in Early Industrial Merthyr Tydfil*, (University of Wales Press, 1993), p.28. The average output quoted was depressed by virtue of the survival of a number of charcoal fired furnaces.

⁵ Pawson, p.72

To the east of Merthyr lay a concentration of irontowns at the heads of the Monmouthshire valleys, collectively referred to as the northern outcrop irontowns. In the early stages, Blaenavon was the most important of the Monmouthshire works, having the third highest output of any British works in 1806, though it was later to decline⁶. In 1812, the four Merthyr ironworks accounted for 40% of the South Wales output, and the Monmouthshire ironworks 42%⁷.

Although the output of South Wales peaked in absolute terms in 1871, in practice it declined in importance from the 1850s, with the opening of ore fields in Cumbria, Cleveland, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire⁸. By the late 1870s, its percentage share of the national output ran at around 10%⁹.

It was on the northern outcrop of Carboniferous strata that the raw materials of ironmaking (coal, iron ore, and limestone) were readily available. The northern outcrop extended beyond Monmouthshire and Glamorgan into the very southernmost parishes of Breconshire, including Llanelly, Llangattock, and Llangynidr (fig. 2.1) which meant the iron industry also developed in those parishes.

Technological advances were an enabling factor in the birth of the iron industry, including Darby's experiments with coke-fired furnaces at Coalbrookdale in Shropshire (1709), Watt's improvement to Newcomen's steam engine (1765), and Cort's patenting of the puddling process (1783-4) for the conversion of pig iron to wrought iron, which was further developed by the Cyfarthfa ironmaster, Richard Crawshay in the late 1780s, to become known as the Welsh Method¹⁰.

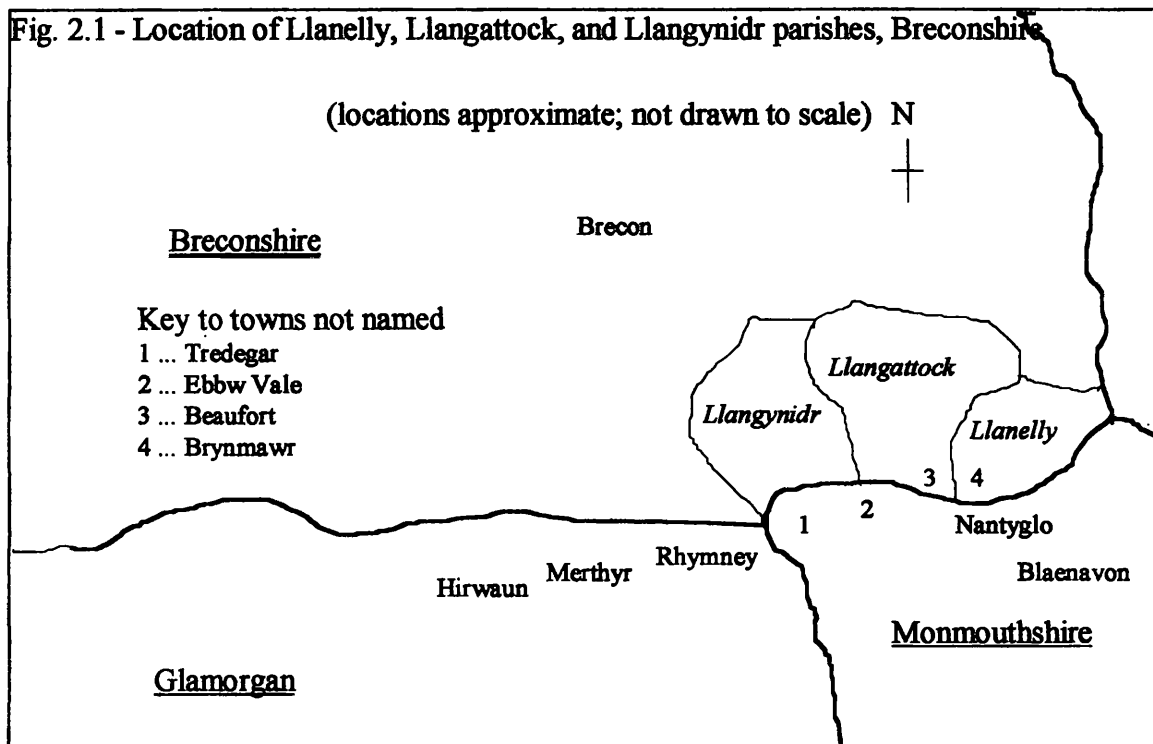
⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Atkinson and Baber, p.8

⁸ Atkinson and Baber, p.6

⁹ Ibid., p.6

¹⁰ Crawshay took out a license under patent from Cort in 1787: Chris Evans, *The Labyrinth of Flames*, (University of Wales Press, 1993), pp. 96-7.



War provided a considerable stimulus to the industry, because of the huge demand for munitions. Hence, the first ironworks appeared at Merthyr in the 1750s and 60s, against the backdrop of the Seven Years War (1756-63), and the American War of Independence (1776-83), these being the Dowlais (1759), Plymouth (1763), Cyfarthfa (1765), and Penydarren (1784) works. Dowlais was for a time the biggest ironworks in the world, though Cyfarthfa came to surpass it. Those to the east, in Monmouthshire, began mainly from the late 1780s, during the wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France (1793-1815), and included the Sirhowy works (late 1770s), the Beaufort works (1779), the Ebbw Vale and Blaenavon works (both 1789), the Nantyglo (1792), and Tredegar works (1800). The Clydach works (1793) can be considered part of the Monmouthshire group, although actually just over the county border in Breconshire.

The County of Breconshire

Breconshire was a rural, predominantly agricultural county. It covered an area of 466,000 acres, excluding water. It was mountainous: about half lay above 1,000 ft. OD, although there were also river valleys, most notably those of the Usk and Wye,

but also the lesser rivers of Irfon and Llynfi. These valleys generally contained the better quality farmlands and the greatest concentrations of population: the Usk valley contained the towns of Crickhowell and the county town of Brecon, whilst the Wye valley contained Builth Wells and Hay-on-Wye. The uplands were thinly populated, and the settlement pattern there was one of scattered, remote farmsteads. As might be expected, the county was not heavily populated: the census of 1801 records a population of 32,325.

The river valleys were an important means of communication. The London to west Wales coach road (1757) and the Brecon to Abergavenny Canal (1800) both ran through the Usk Valley, as does the A.40 today.

The land use of the county in 1854 broke down as follows¹¹:

Arable	15%	Wood	3.7%
Permanent grass	24%	Urban	3%
Rough grazing	47.3%	Mountain and water	7%

Farming was mostly small scale and pastoral (sheep and cattle) on the uplands, with larger holdings of a mixed or arable nature, in the lowlands of the river valleys. Clarke, in his report on the agriculture of Breconshire in 1794, estimated that almost two thirds of the county had been enclosed. The single greatest enclosure was that of the Great Forest of Brecknock in 1816-1819, when some 40,000 acres of grazed common were enclosed.

Llanelly Parish

The parish is shown in fig 2.2, which is an extract from the modern Ordnance Survey (scale 1:50,000) with the borders of the parish drawn in. In 1875, the town of Brynmawr was removed from the parish, to become a parish in its own right.

¹¹ J. Phillip Dodd, 'The Brecknockshire Crop Returns for 1854', *Brycheiniog*, VI, 1960, pp.79-92, p. 86

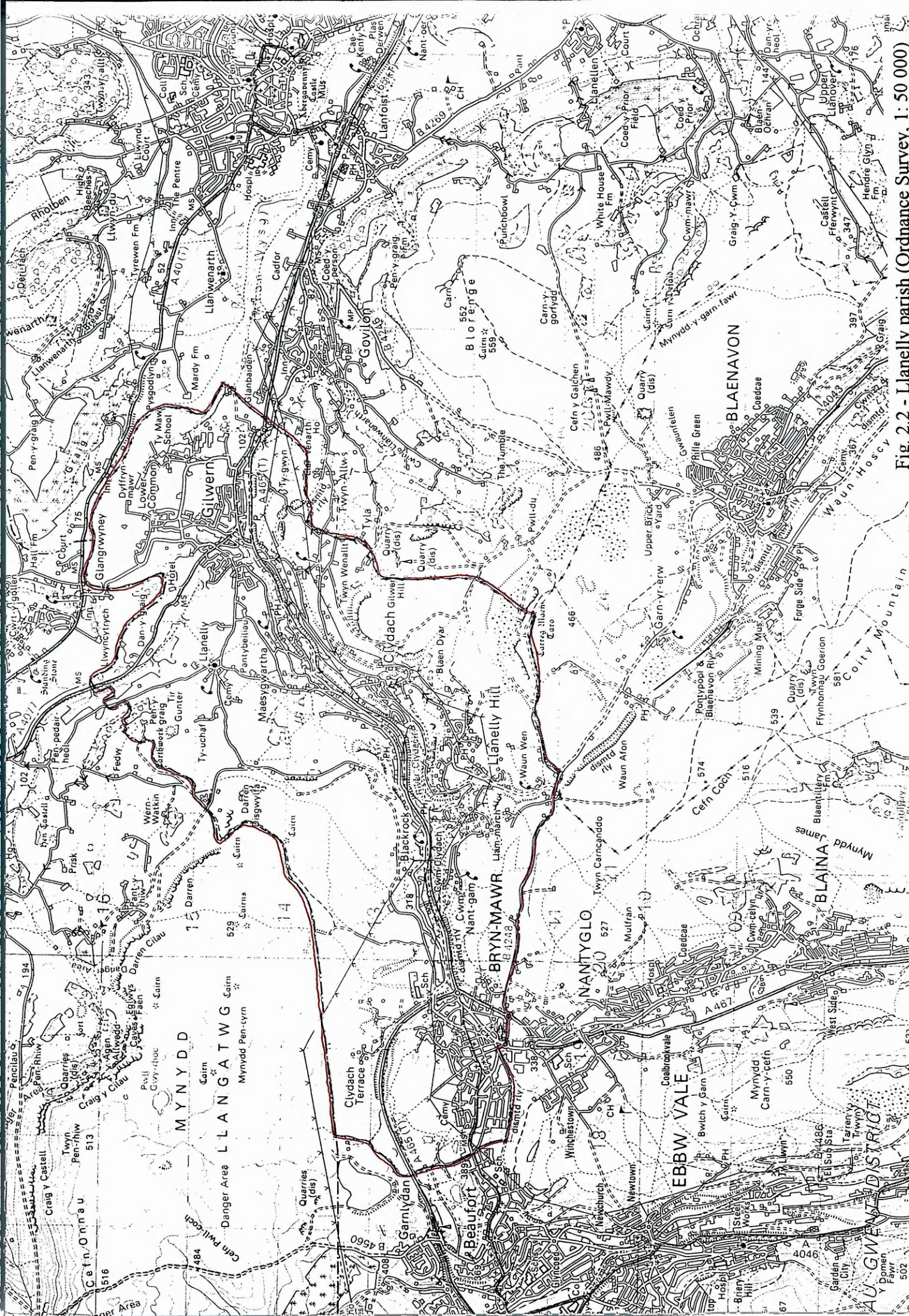


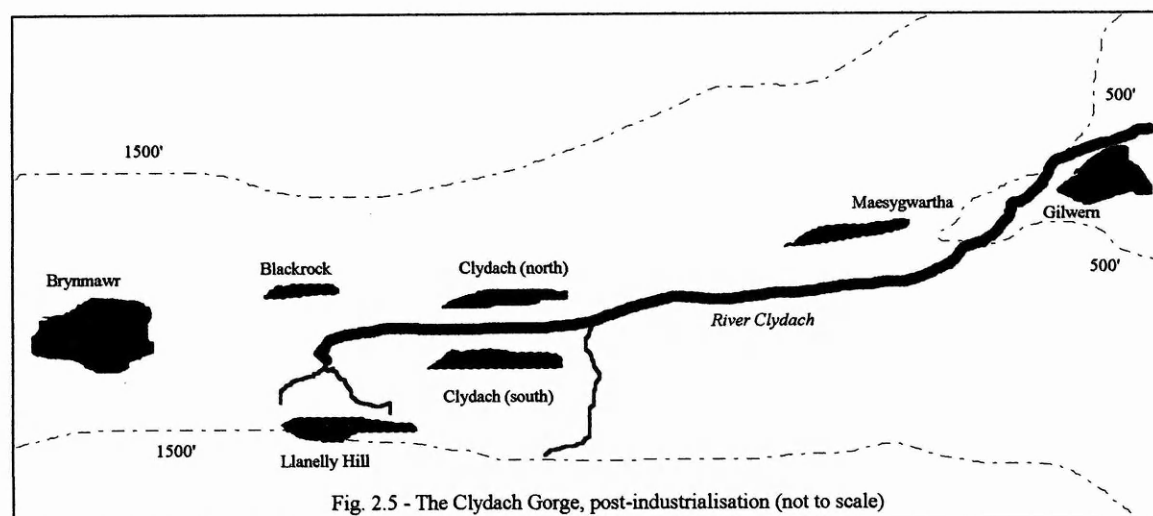
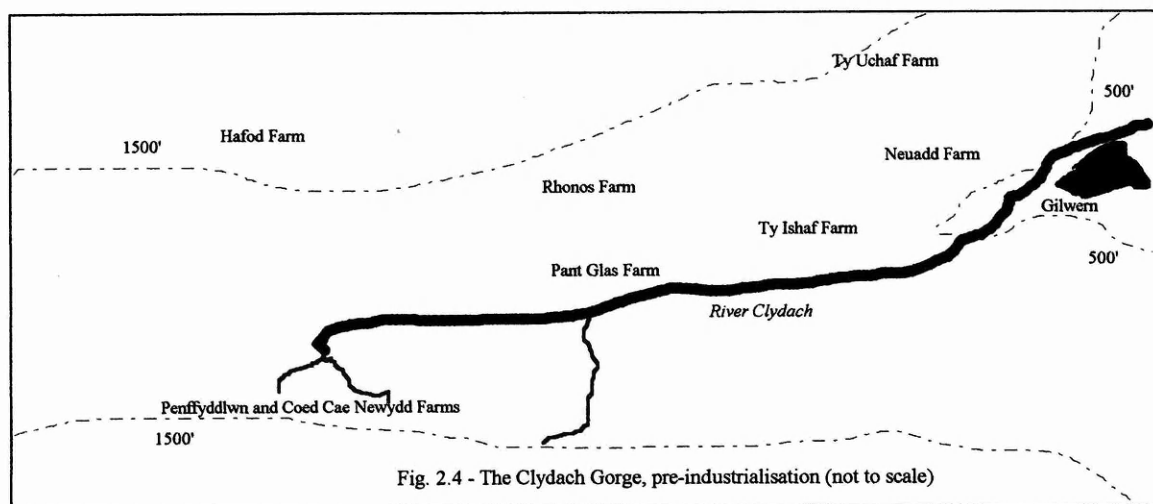
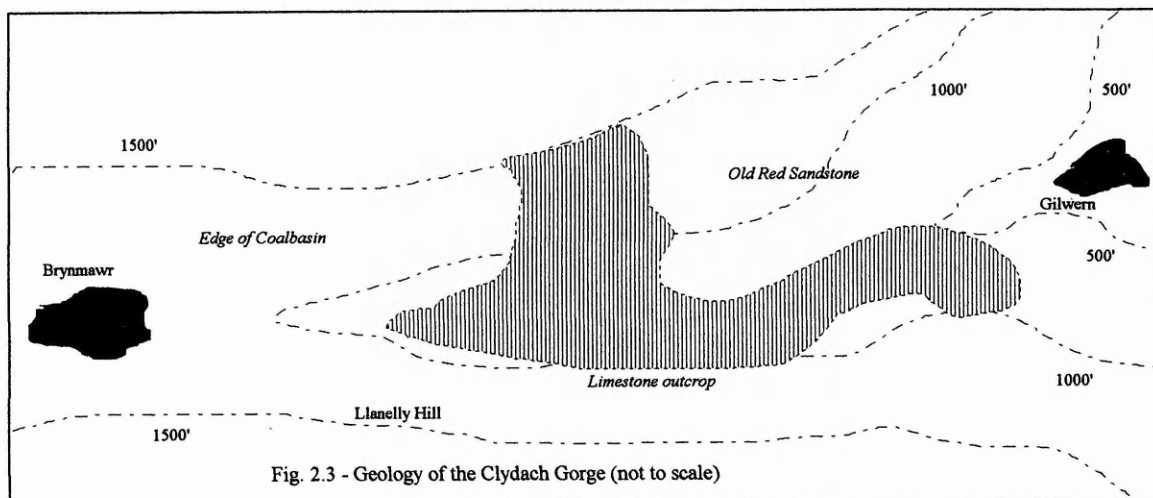
Fig 2.2 - Llanelli parish (Ordnance Survey, 1:50 000)

The parish covered an area of 5,183 acres and, prior to industrialisation, was thinly populated. The eastern part of the parish opened onto the Usk Valley, where the agricultural village of Gilwern was to be found, with its tradesmen and craftsmen, and the larger estates of well-to-do yeomen. The geology here was Old Red Sandstone and the farming was mixed. The Usk was fed by the River Clydach, which rose in the western portion of the parish, in a deep narrow gorge (the Clydach Gorge), to the north and south of which rose high moorland to a height of 1,500 ft OD. It was here that the Carboniferous strata outcropped, to straddle the Gorge (fig. 2.3). Farming in this part of the parish was pastoral, and the soils of poor quality. This study concentrates on the Gorge area, as the iron industry was confined to this part of the parish.

Before the development of the iron industry, the Clydach Gorge contained no more than a handful of small hillfarms, probably operating at or near subsistence level (fig. 2.4). By an early stage in the nineteenth century, industry had created a string of settlements through the Gorge, including the town of Brynmawr to the west, the quarrying village of Blackrock, the iron producing village of Clydach, and the coal and iron mining community of Llanelly Hill (fig. 2.5). These new settlements, and their inhabitants, would provide a marked contrast with the older 'conservative, slow moving, agricultural villages of Gilwern, Llanelly Church and [outside the parish] Crickhowell'¹².

The names of the farms in the Gorge are reminders of the ancient practice of transhumance, whereby livestock was sheltered in the valley over winter, and moved to the upland slopes for grazing in the summer. This gave rise to two farmsteads: one in the valley, the *Ty Ishaf*, or lower house, and one on the mountain, the *Ty Uchaf*, or upper house (or alternatively, the *Hafod*, or summer dwelling). Other farm names are equally indicative of antiquity: the *Neuadd*, or 'Hall', in this case a longhouse of

¹² Hilda Jennings, *Brynmawr: A Study of a Distressed Area*, (Allenson, 1934), p.28



perhaps mediaeval origin, in which farmer and livestock originally lived under a single roof. This was a fairly common pattern of Welsh farmhouse, with one end of

the house forming the hall, or living area, separated by a screen or passageway from a cow byre at the other end.

Despite the arrival of industry in the parish, much of it remained agricultural. Land use in the parish in 1839 reflected the physical geography, consisting of a high proportion of pastureland and common grazing on the uplands:

Land type	Acreage
Common Land	1,500 (37.5%)
Pasture	1,440 (36.0%)
Arable	1,000 (25.0%)
Woodland	60 (1.5%)
Total	4,000 (100.0%)

Source: Agreement for Commutation of Tithes, 1839, Gwent CRO

Farming was conducted on a fairly small scale. Llanelly parish lay in the Crickhowell Poor Law Union, where the average size holding was 86 acres, compared with an average of 113 acres for Breconshire. (The average sized farm in England and Wales in 1851 was said to be 111 acres)¹³.

The parish was divided between the Old Red Sandstone geology of the Usk Valley, and the Carboniferous strata around the Clydach Gorge. This meant farming was considerably better around the Usk. Samuel Lewis in his *Topographical Dictionary* (1848) described 'that portion [of the parish] which constitutes the River Usk being the most fertile, and the mountainous and mineral districts very barren'¹⁴. Hence, the better quality soils of the Usk Valley supported a mixed farming economy, with a variety of crops. The 1848 production of this part of the parish, in bushels per

¹³ W.A. Armstrong, 'The Use of Information about Occupation', in E.A. Wrigley (Ed.), *Nineteenth Century Society, Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (Cambridge, 1972), p.225

¹⁴ Samuel Lewis, *The Topographical Dictionary of Wales*, 3rd edn. (Lewis, 1848), Vol.II, p.10

acre, was 17-21 for wheat, 21 for barley, and 15-20 for peas¹⁵. The Crickhowell and Hay Poor Law Unions together formed 'the granary for the county, more wheat and barley being grown here than in any other region'¹⁶. Only oats and potatoes could be grown on the poor clay soils of the Gorge, but even here, Lewis recorded that 'the mountains of the coal tract ... support vast numbers of sheep and cattle'¹⁷.

In some ways, agriculture benefited from the arrival of industry, which provided large markets on the doorstep of the agricultural districts. The 1854 crop returns for Breconshire revealed a distinct bias in the number of milch cows in the Merthyr Poor Law Union (part of which fell within the county) in order to provide milk for the coalmining valleys to the south¹⁸. Breconshire exported little grain, but that which it did export was sent to the colliery districts of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire. Industry also absorbed the surplus population of the rural districts 'that would otherwise be a drain on their resources'¹⁹. In doing so, it brought about a scarcity of agricultural labour which helped sustain or even increase agricultural wages as late as the 1890s²⁰. Agricultural workers could also earn a higher wage by temporarily migrating to the industrial towns over the winter, when agricultural activity was low, and returning to the land in summer: '... many of the unskilled workers in the coal mines and in the iron industry worked in the winter time and returned to their farms in the summer season to look after the harvest'²¹.

The sheep farming that took place on the uplands gave rise to an important cottage-based manufacture of woollens. This activity was particularly suited to long winter evenings on the hill farms, and had as its outlet the fairs and twice weekly

¹⁵ Lewis, p.117

¹⁶ J. Phillip Dodd, 'The Brecknockshire Crop Returns for 1854', *Brycheiniog*, VI, 1960, p.91

¹⁷ Lewis, p.120

¹⁸ Dodd, p.90

¹⁹ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, *Explorations and Explanations, Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales*, (Gomer Press, 1981) p.222

²⁰ Major E. Lister, evidence to Royal Commission on Land, 13th March, 1894, Minutes of Evidence, vol.II, p.768

²¹ H. Carter & W.K.D. Davies, (Eds.), *Geography, Culture and Habitat: Selected Essays of E.G. Bowen*, (Gomer Press, 1976), p.28

markets at Abergavenny. Thus Abergavenny's main trade in 1848 was not iron or coal, but wool.

Abergavenny was the most important local town (although it lay in Monmouthshire). It was the commercial centre for the surrounding agricultural area and also lay on the London to west Wales coach road. In 1809, it had a population of 2,573, occupying 520 houses. Its main economic base was agricultural produce, and shoe and furniture manufacture. It was a resort in summer, and its character was altogether different to the irontowns that would grow up some four miles to the west. It was 'a genteel health resort, where fashionable invalids drank goats' milk'²².

Local raw materials in Llanelly parish had been exploited at an early stage. Limestone quarrying was taking place by the mid-eighteenth century at the Llangattock quarry. This quarry was sited just outside the parish, but gave employment to some of its inhabitants. The parish registers record four deaths caused by rockfalls at the quarry between 1754 and 1797. Limestone was required for building purposes, but also as an agricultural fertiliser in the form of burnt lime. Early limekilns in the Gorge testify to this use, as do field names such as Cae Robin (a corruption of *Cae'r oddin*, meaning the kiln field). Later, limestone was used as a flux in the blast furnaces of the ironworks. Fused scoria found on the hillside may indicate iron smelting took place in Roman times, but it was certainly underway by the 1590s, when iron cooking utensils were made at a bowl-type furnace at Coed Cae Newydd above the Clydach Gorge. The Hanbury family of Pontypool, who had been involved in iron manufacture at Tintern and other sites since the 1570s, built a charcoal-fired furnace and forge near the banks of the River Clydach. Known as the Llanelly furnace and forge, this operation dated from around 1606 for the furnace, and 1615 for the

²² Jennings, p.28.

forge²³, and lasted until the 1790s. There were associated iron and coal mines in Llanelly parish by 1711²⁴.

During the 1790s the parish underwent rapid industrial development, due to the setting up of the Clydach Ironworks (c.1793). The parish had no transport network, and so this had to be provided. Two railroads (using horsedrawn trams) and a stone road were built in the 1790s. The Brecon to Abergavenny Canal was opened in 1800, with wharves at Gilwern, and from 1812 extended to meet the Monmouthshire Canal and link with the docks at Newport. A turnpike road between Abergavenny and Merthyr was built in 1812-13, and two tramroads were added in 1821 and 1830. All these routes (save for the canal) ran through the Clydach Gorge. Their purpose was to link local ironworks with the canal and limestone quarries.

The Brecon Boat Company utilised the canal to carry coal to Brecon, Herefordshire, and Mid-Wales, and so set up the Clydach Colliery in the Gorge, between about 1801-1860. In 1820 this colliery produced 12,000 tons of coal, and in 1848 employed 100 men. The colliery died with the opening of the Merthyr to Abergavenny Railway through the Gorge in 1861²⁵. The son of the Company's chief boat builder, the Brecon entrepreneur Mordecai Jones, also opened a small coal mine in the Gorge, but further details of this are not known.

The Clydach Ironworks

The primary agent of industrialisation in Llanelly parish was the Clydach Ironworks, which were founded by a partnership of Edward Frere, Thomas Cooke, and the Kendall family. Cooke managed the Llanelly furnace and forge, and had at one time been a manager at Richard Crawshay's Cyfarthfa Ironworks²⁶. Frere was from a

²³ W.E. Minchinton, 'The Place of Brecknock in the Industrialisation of South Wales', *Brycheiniog*, 7, 1961, p.7

²⁴ See: Theophilus Jones, *The History of the County of Brecknock*, 1st edn, vol.II, (1809), p.679 and pp. 766-7.

²⁵ Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Wales*, 3rd edn., (S. Lewis, 1848) p.10; and D. Davies, *Some Interesting People of Breconshire*, (Brecon and Radnor Express and County Times, n.d.) p.25.

²⁶ Evans, p.64, f.37

landed East Anglian family and had also been a manager at Cyfarthfa²⁷. The Kendalls were a Shropshire family who owned the Beaufort Ironworks and in 1779 had leased substantial lands and mineral rights in Llanelly and Llangattock parishes from the Duke of Beaufort. In 1796, the Kendalls leased coal and iron ore grounds at Llamarch and Gellyfelen in Llanelly parish to Frere and Cooke²⁸. It was because of these origins that John Lloyd described the Clydach works as an off-shoot of the Beaufort works²⁹. The lease was backdated to 25th March 1793, suggesting that the Clydach Ironworks were founded around that year.

The Kendalls were at first in partnership with Frere and Cooke, but in 1801 the Duke of Beaufort insisted on them being removed. From 1803 the Brecon solicitors Walter and John Powell joined the partnership, though relations between them and the Freres soured in the 1820s, with Frere's brother George threatening a Chancery action for monies supposedly owed him, and disagreeing with John Powell as to the efficiency of the works manager, John Scale³⁰. Launcelot Powell, who succeeded Scale as manager, was more forthright in his opinion of the Freres. In 1829 he wrote of Edward Frere's ham-fisted attempt to repair a mill fly wheel: 'the madness of Mr Frere is one of the many instances by which the works had lost many thousands and the sooner you get rid of him from this place the better'³¹.

In 1805, the Clydach works employed about 400 hands. By 1842, the workforce had risen to 1,354, of whom 447 were employed at the ironworks and 907 at the coal and iron mines on Llanelly Hill³². Reliable figures for production at the works are available from 1805. To put the relative standing of the Clydach works in proper perspective, its output between 1805 and 1845 is given in Table 2.1, together with the output of the Nantyglo works, which was the most prominent of local

²⁷ Evans, p.64. Frere's father was John Frere, MP for Norwich. His son was Sir Henry Bartle Frere, Governor of Bombay (1862) and Cape Colony (1877).

²⁸ Lease 1st January 1796, Edward and Jonathan Kendall to Frere and Cooke (Maybery, 281)

²⁹ John Lloyd, *Early History of the Old South Wales Ironworks*, (London, 1906), the Preface, p.iv.

³⁰ Letter, John Powell to John Scale, 12th January, 1828 (Maybery, 3577).

³¹ Letter Launcelot Powell to John Powell, 31st October 1829, (Maybery, 3812).

³² W.E. Minchinton, p.21

ironworks, and with the industrial giant of Cyfarthfa. Table 2.2 shows the output of the Clydach Ironworks in comparison with other local ironworks in 1830.

Table 2.1 - Output of Clydach, Nantyglo, and Cyfarthfa Ironworks (in tons) 1805-40

Year	Clydach	Nantyglo	Cyfarthfa
1805	1,455	---	---
1810	1,372	---	---
1815	2,999	4,684	---
1820	3,397	8,826	19,010
1825	3,784	16,536	23,063
1830	7,573	17,536	19,892
1835	7,652	24,997	35,090
1840	10,038	36,711*	35,507
1845	12,062	38,797	67,448

Source: Atkinson and Baber, p.11, based on shipments of iron to Newport and Cardiff; * probably includes Beaufort works; Cyfarthfa's figures include Hirwaun.

Table 2.2 - Output of local ironworks in 1830 (in tons)

Ebbw Vale	18,258	Varteg	9,436
Nantyglo	17,536	Clydach	7,573
Blaenavon	13,078	Beaufort	6,005
Tredegar	12,335		

Source: Atkinson and Barber, p.11, based on shipments of iron to Newport and Cardiff.

The Clydach Ironworks was a dispersed affair, having furnaces and forges at differing sites in the Clydach Gorge, and mines on Llanelly Hill. It held more leasehold than freehold land, rented principally from the major local landowner, the Duke of

Beaufort, either directly or through the Kendall family. This was the usual pattern of landholding amongst South Wales ironworks³³.

The Duke of Beaufort owned some 765 acres in the parish in 1847 (roughly 19% of the surface area), including the ground on which the villages of Clydach, Blackrock, and Llanelly Hill stood. The Clydach Ironworks owned 202 acres, including land at Ynys-y-Garth, and several of the farms in the Gorge, including Coed Cae Newydd, Penffyddlwn, Pant Glas, and Ty Ishaf farms. It leased a further 350 acres from various freeholders, as detailed in table 2.3.

There were geographical disadvantages with the Clydach site, including the poor quality of local ores, but they were also handicapped by lack of capital and poor management. John Lloyd wrote that 'What might have been a small success in the hands of a strong capitalist could not but prove a failure, when in the hands of, and conducted by men of little capital'.³⁴ The works were offered for sale (unsuccessfully) in 1810, 1813 and 1833, and by 1812 Walter Powell was regretting his involvement in that 'unfortunate concern, the Clydach works'³⁵. His sentiments were echoed by the manager, Thomas Phillips, who complained in 1805 of the absence of his masters, and their lack of interest in the 'unlucky place'³⁶.

The works were also hit by the failure of major customers, including Le Bas Brothers, of Jersey, a merchant house through which the works sold bar iron to the French market in the early 1820s³⁷. It was customary for the South Wales ironworks to sell to merchant houses (usually London or Bristol based) prior to the railway boom of the 1840s and direct sales to railway companies³⁸.

³³ Atkinson and Baber, p.21.

³⁴ Lloyd, p.193

³⁵ Letter, Walter Powell to Benjamin Hall, 6th September 1812 (Maybery, 3269)

³⁶ Letter, Thomas Phillips to John and Walter Powell, 29th May 1805 (Maybery, 6390).

³⁷ Lloyd p.192; and see correspondence between Edward Frere and N. Le Bas & Brothers, 1820-22 (Maybery 3303-6, and 3310-11).

³⁸ Atkinson and Baber, pp. 68-69.

Table 2.3 - Leasehold land held by Clydach Iron Company, 1847

Freeholder	Acreage	Use
Duke of Beaufort	238	Workmen's' houses & gardens; 2 company shops; offices; blast furnaces; coke yards; 2 quarries; balance pit; machine house
Capel Hanbury Leigh	36	Forge pond; brickworks; forge buildings & yard;
Rev. Richard Payne Davies	34	Rolling mills
John Powell	15	Unspecified
William Watkins	12	Quarry; sawpit; timber yard
Robert Williams	9	Unspecified
Thomas Evans	4	Unspecified
Rev. Charles Vaughan	2	Unspecified
Total acreage	350	

Source: Tithe map and apportionment, 1847, Gwent CRO, D/PA 22. 47

Atkinson and Baber point out the importance of the lease under which an ironworks acquired its mineral rights³⁹. Early leases, taken out before the landowner understood their full potential, were usually the most favourable to the lessee. The most successful South Wales ironworks were Dowlais and Cyfarthfa, whose early leases involved low land rental and no royalty payments on minerals. Such leases also meant the companies concerned could benefit from the income to be had from sub-letting. This point is important in relation to the Clydach Ironworks. The Kendall family paid an annual rent of £17.10s. to the Duke of Beaufort for the mineral properties they

³⁹ Atkinson and Baber, pp.21-25,

leased in Llanelly parish, but imposed a rent of £780 for the lands sub-let to the Clydach partnership, plus a royalty of 9d per ton of coal⁴⁰.

The Clydach works tried various means to raise capital, taking on the Powells as additional partners in 1803, borrowing from fellow entrepreneurs, and mortgaging the works in 1834 to Wilkins & Co., the Brecon bankers (to whom Edward Frere was related by marriage)⁴¹. The works' financial state became more acute in the 1850s when Wilkins & Co. demanded a reduction in its overdraft, and the Powell family pressed for repayment of debts owed them. In 1861 the Brecon Canal Company obtained a judgement for unpaid tonnage charges and the works were declared bankrupt. Thereafter, John Jayne, one of the trustees in bankruptcy, and a former truckmaster⁴² at Nantyglo, attempted to revive the works, firstly through his interest in the New Clydach Sheet and Bar Iron Company (from 1864), then on his own behalf (from 1867). On his death in 1873, the works were acquired by the Brynmawr Iron and Coal Company. All these proprietors met finally with financial failure. The works went into receivership and were wound up permanently in 1877.

Llanelly Hill

This study focuses in particular on the settlements at Llanelly Hill, from where the Clydach Ironworks obtained its coal and iron ore. Llanelly Hill is a stretch of high moorland on the south side of the Gorge. Prior to its development as a mining community, Llanelly Hill consisted of two farms, Penffyddlwn and Coed Cae Newydd, and little else. The land was used as a grouse moor by the Duke of Beaufort's shooting parties, but was leased to the Kendalls in 1779, then sub-let by the

⁴⁰ Lloyd, p.179.

⁴¹ Methods of raising capital prior to limited liability companies are discussed by T.S. Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830*, (Oxford, 1968), pp. 78-79.

⁴² i.e. proprietor of the company shop, which operated the truck system. Nantyglo's ironmaster was the ruthlessly acquisitive Crawshay Bailey, who by now owned the Beaufort works, and hence had a reversionary interest in the Clydach works.

Kendalls to the Clydach partnership. As a consequence the Duke's rental income from this land rose from £60 to £2,000 per annum, between 1789 and 1809⁴³.

The mining of coal and iron ore had begun on Llanelly Hill by 1795 at the latest, since there was mention in that year of the Llamarch New Level which had lately been built by Frere and Cooke⁴⁴.

Professor Carter has described the evolution of the early industrial settlements in the South Wales iron belt⁴⁵. They often grew up immediately adjacent to the furnaces or mines they served, and might initially consist of no more than a row of houses and a company shop, as did Nantyglo in 1800. Because the raw materials were often found in remote places, there was usually no pre-existing settlement at the site. Indeed, the nearest centres of population might be some distance away, with nothing more than a farm or two in the immediate locality. Such farms were often at the edge of a moorland plateau, where the good ground gave out. Industrial settlements might grow around the nuclei of furnaces, mines, or these farms, and often took their names from the farms themselves, or from natural features.

The development of Llanelly Hill can be traced in exactly this way. It comprised in all eight settlement areas, ranged across a moorland plateau. Its most central and largest settlement, Darenfelen, consisted of a group of houses, and a company shop, adjacent to Penffyddlwn Farm. This settlement was nucleated around a junction of the Llamarch railroad, connecting the mines with the furnaces. The other two main settlements, Llamarch and Gellyfelen, were situated alongside areas worked for coal and ironstone by drift mines or levels, and a 'patch', or open-cast mine, at Gellyfelen⁴⁶. Llamarch, which had no natural point of focus like Darenfelen, followed a much more dispersed pattern of settlement (aided by the fact that the Clydach

⁴³ Theophilus Jones, vol.II, pp. 480-481

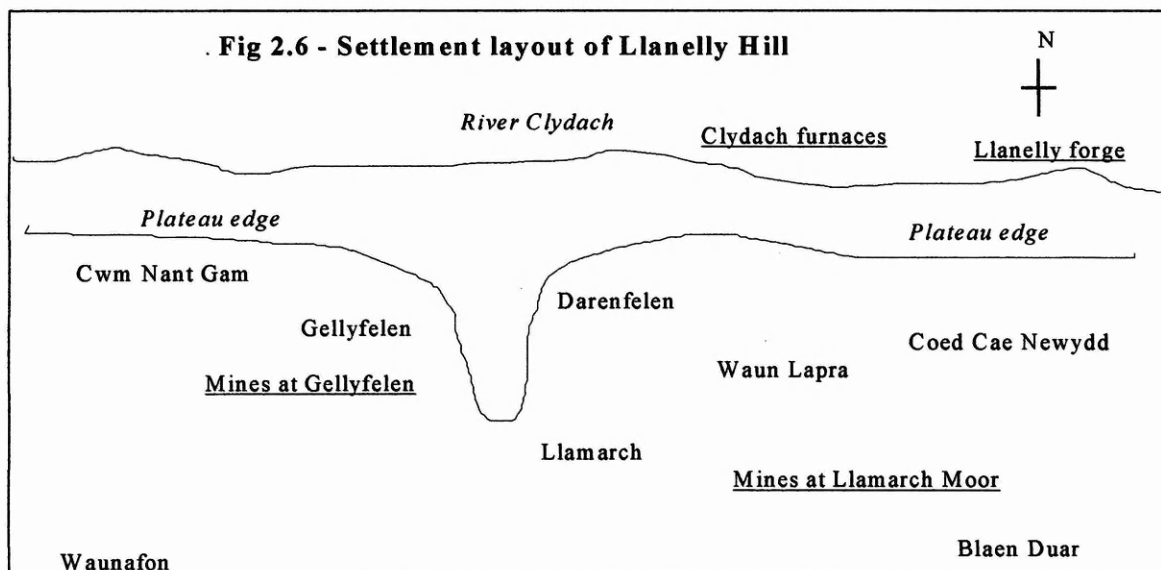
⁴⁴ Letter from Edward Frere to John Powell, 8th September 1795, and lease from Edward and Jonathan Kendall to Edward Frere and Thomas Cooke, 1st January 1796 (Maybery, 3170 and 281).

⁴⁵ Harold Carter, *The Towns of Wales*, (Cardiff, 1966), p.72

⁴⁶ Patching was a primitive means of obtaining ironstone at the surface, widely used in the early stages of the South Wales iron industry: see Chris Evans, *The Labyrinth of Flames*, (University of Wales Press, 1993), p. 34

company allowed workers to build their own houses at will). The nucleated and dispersed settlement patterns on Llanelly Hill may best be studied in maps of 1869 and 1880 in Appendices 1 and 2. The settlement layouts on Llanelly Hill contrasted with the village of Clydach, which took a linear form, dictated by the steep narrow nature of the Clydach Gorge. Clydach village grew along the Abergavenny to Merthyr turnpike road, where it intersected with the Clydach railroad. Again, the layout of Clydach is shown in a map of 1880 in Appendix 2.

Other settlement areas on Llanelly Hill were smaller in size than the main ones outlined above, and may be considered as satellites (like Mount Pleasant), or in-fills between the larger settlements. These included Coed Cae Newydd, which was based around a farm of the same name. Fig. 2.6 shows the main settlement areas of Llanelly Hill and their relation to one another (not to scale).



The names of the settlements derived from natural features: Cwm Nant Gam (vale of the crooked stream), Y Fedw Ddu (the black birches), Darenfelen (yellow rock, or

yellow rocky hillside, possibly referring to yellow flowering gorse)⁴⁷, and the component *waun*, meaning moor, as in Waun Lapra and Waunafon.

Llanelly Hill might be called a form of 'embryonic town': that is, a settlement that failed to develop into an urban centre. It best fits P.N. Jones' description of a 'semiurban' environment, having urban or industrial characteristics, but in a rural setting⁴⁸. In fact, as can be seen from its layout above, it encompassed a number of individual settlements which, nonetheless, had a common location and purpose, and which formed a single community. It was well described in 1909, as a 'cluster of low hills, on which were several small villages and straggling houses'⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ These translations are taken from private manuscript notes of the late Mr Gwyn Evans, a local resident.

⁴⁸ P.N. Jones, *Mines, Migrants and Residence in the South Wales Steamcoal Valleys*, (Hull University Press, 1987), p.9

⁴⁹ Thomas Jordan, *My Reminiscences of the Old Clydach Ironworks and Neighbourhood*, (n. pub., 1909), n.p.

Chapter 3

Population

The Population of Breconshire

The population of Breconshire in 1676 was said to be 13,311¹. It increased slowly through the eighteenth century, from 27,200 in 1700, to 29,400 in 1750 (these figures are official estimates) to 32,325 at the 1801 census². This was a rise of just 18% over the course of the century (against an estimated growth of some 53.45% in the population of England and Wales over the same period). Around 1800-1801 the population decreased due to the harvest failures and famines of 1795-6 and 1799-1801, or, as Lord Glanusk put it: 'seasons unhealthy and the bread then eaten extremely bad, which ... occasioned ... an extraordinary mortality'³.

There was a widespread belief amongst the 'country people' of Breconshire that the population of the county had previously been much larger. This belief was apparently based on the number of ruined cottages in the county. In 1801 there were 479 uninhabited houses in Breconshire, out of a total of 6,794. By 1841, the figures were 833 empty houses out of a total of 11,467. Glanusk says that ruined cottages could mean no more than the owners abandoning them for somewhere better, but he was more likely to have been right when he observed that 'The people [of Breconshire] have shared the tendency observed throughout England and Wales to leave the country and flock into the towns'⁴.

¹ At the Compton Census; the shortcomings of this as a source are mentioned later.

² John Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, Vol.I, Welsh Office, 1985, p. 6 for estimates, p. 9 for census figures.

³ Theophilus Jones, *The History of the County of Brecknock*, 3rd edn., (Glanusk), 1909, Vol I, p.10. Glanusk was working from 'transcripts', which were probably the abstracts of parish registers associated with the census.

⁴ Theophilus Jones, 1909, Vol.I, p.10

The population of Breconshire fluctuated over the course of the nineteenth century⁵:

1801	32,325	1851	61,474
1811	37,735	1861	61,627
1821	43,826	1871	59,901
1831	47,736	1881	57,746
1841	55,603	1891	57,031

The steady rise in population between 1801 and 1861 seems to have been attributable partly to natural increase, and partly due to in-migration brought about by the iron industry in the southern parishes of the county. This in-migration is reflected in the fact that, in 1841, 29% of the population of Breconshire had been born outside the county (though this compared with 39% in the more heavily industrialised county of Monmouthshire). Similarly, an *internal* migration to the industrial parishes was reflected in the fact that the county was most densely populated around the best agricultural land at the beginning of the century, but in the industrial areas by the third quarter⁶. However, the Breconshire iron industry failed in the 1860s, by which time in-migration to the industrial parishes had been overtaken by an overall outward movement of population. As early as 1841-51, Breconshire, a mainly rural agricultural county, was experiencing a negative rate of net migration. In that decade, the overall increase in population was 6.78%, yet the natural increase had been 11.05%, leaving a net migration rate of -4.27%⁷. The rate remained negative (that is, more people were leaving than arriving) in each decade to 1911, peaking at -16.64% between 1871 and 1881 (this peak probably coincided with an hiatus between the failure of the iron and the expansion of the coal industries). Throughout the latter half of the century,

⁵ Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, Vol.I, p.9. The figures given are for the ancient county.

⁶W.E. Minchinton, 'The Place of Brecknock in the Industrialisation of South Wales', *Brycheiniog*, Vol.VII, 1961, at pp.40-41

⁷ Williams, Vol.I, p.9

Breconshire was a county of dispersion, in common with all other Welsh counties, except those which were the main centres of industry, these being Monmouthshire and Glamorganshire (coal) in the south, and Caernarfon and Merioneth (slate) in the north, all four of which were counties of absorption. The Breconshire population of 57,031 in 1891 was considerably smaller than the industrialised counties immediately to the south: Monmouthshire (248,054) and Glamorgan (687,218).

The 1891 figure for Breconshire was the population of the ancient county. A combination of the Public Health Act 1875 and the Local Government Act 1888 had transferred some of the urban sanitary districts in the south of the county to Monmouthshire. The population of the resulting administrative county of Breconshire was only 51,393. (The transfer did not affect Llanelly parish).

Breconshire was comprised of four Registration Districts (fig. 3.1). The industrial parishes, including Llanelly, lay in the Crickhowell Registration District. This district was the smallest in area, but had the largest population in 1851 (table 3.1). This was due largely to in-migration to the industrial parishes. In 1851, 42% of the population of the Registration District had been born outside Breconshire (the figure for the whole county was 29% of its population born elsewhere).

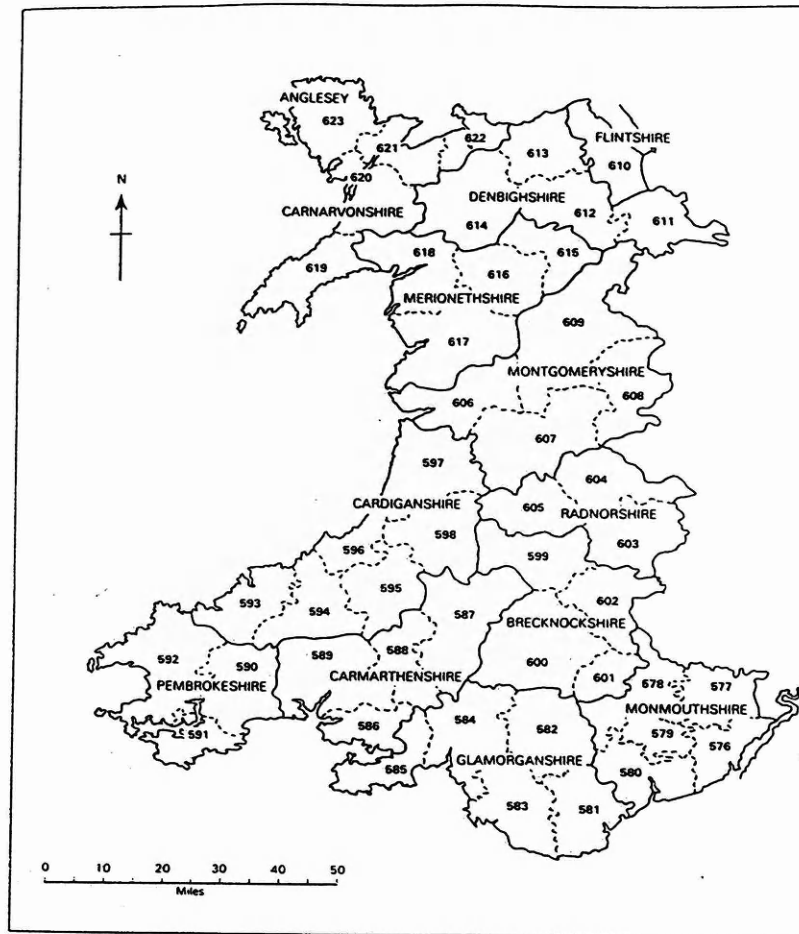
Within the Crickhowell Poor Law Union, the industrial parishes of Llanelly, Llangattock, and Llangynidr, had the largest populations in 1854 (table 3.2). (The population of the Crickhowell Registration District in 1851 was slightly lower than for the Poor Law Union in 1854).

Table 3.1 - Breconshire Registration Districts, 1851, ranked by area and population

District	Area (acres)	District	Population
Brecknock	196,793	Crickhowell	21,697
Builth	102,953	Brecknock	18,174
Hay	89,695	Hay	10,962
Crickhowell	53,692	Builth	8,345
Total	443,133	Total	59,178

Source: 1851 census, population tables, PP, 1852-3, LXXXVII

3.1 Welsh counties and Registration Districts



Key to Breconshire Registration Districts

- | | |
|-----|-------------|
| 599 | Builth |
| 600 | Brecknock |
| 601 | Crickhowell |
| 602 | Hay |

Table 3.2 - Parishes in Crickhowell Poor Law Union, 1854, ranked by population

Parish	Population	Parish	Population
Llanelly	9,644	Llangenny	455
Llangattock	5,415	Llanbedr	286
Llangynidr	3,264	Gwryne Fechan	92
Crickhowell	1,403	Partrishow	76
Llanfihangel Cwmdru	1,066	Gwryne Fawr	14
Total			21,715

Source: Returns relating to the Poor Law Unions, (London, 1854)

The Population of Llanelly Parish

The population of Wales rose steeply at the end of the eighteenth century as 'the 1790s saw the impact of the iron industry and an abrupt increase in numbers'⁸. It seems safe to assume that the pre-industrial population of Llanelly parish was scant. One writer has surmised that the addition of an aisle to the parish church in 1626 (which doubled seating capacity) may have been due to a rise in population caused by the Llanelly furnace and forge (which the writer dates to 1616), but this is speculation⁹. Certainly, at the Compton Census of 1676, the population of the parish was returned as 86, though this would have been the adult population only, and the basis on which the Compton returns were compiled is sometimes unclear¹⁰. If reliable, this figure would represent a population density of 11 adults per square mile, with a probable concentration around Gilwern and the Usk Valley part of the parish. The effect of the Llanelly furnace on the population was probably not great, as production was seasonal, and intermittent.

Before the census of 1801, and those thereafter, evidence as to population is circumstantial. In the decade 1790-1799, 55 marriages were recorded in the Llanelly parish registers. (Nonconformist chapels did not start to appear in the parish until the

⁸ Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales?*, (Penguin, 1985), p.173

⁹ Revd. D. Parry-Jones, *Llanelly Parish, Breconshire*, South Wales Argus, 1963, Article 9; this article gives the date of the Llanelly furnace as 1616, which is probably too early.

¹⁰ The Compton figure is given in Theophilus Jones, 1st edn., 1805, Vol I, Appendix I. For a discussion of the census, and its shortcomings, see A. Crockett and K.D.M. Snell, 'From the 1676 Compton Census to the 1851 Census of Religious Worship: Religious Continuity or Discontinuity?', *Rural History* (1997), 8, 1, 55-89.

1820s, so the parish registers are a reasonably accurate representation of the number of marriages taking place at this time). These marriages involved 100 people indigenous to the parish, and 10 (usually the husbands) from outside, including the parishes of Llanwenarth, Aberystroth, Llanover, Llantilio Pertholey, and Merthyr Tydfil. Three of the parishes (Aberystroth, Llanover, and Merthyr) had ironworks and all, except Merthyr, were local to Llanelly. On the other hand, all except for Aberystroth and Merthyr were parishes bordering the fertile farm lands of the Usk river valley. As the registers at this period did not record evidence of occupation, it is impossible to ascertain whether the incomers were agricultural or industrial workers. It is evident, however, that widespread in-migration was not yet taking place over any distance, although, in 1804, a marriage was conducted at Llanelly parish church by a curate from Staffordshire, which is probably evidence that some migration had taken place from the English Midlands, from whence much of the skilled labour (and entrepreneurial knowledge) for the early South Wales iron industry was drawn. Such movement was facilitated by the fact that the principal iron producing districts of the time, Shropshire, South Staffordshire, and South Wales, were connected by the navigable stretch of the River Severn¹¹.

The real impact of industry upon population can only really be measured in the decennial census of the nineteenth century. The population of the parish rose tenfold between 1801 and 1851, from 937 in 1801 to 9,632 in 1851. Glanusk noted that 'The most remarkable increase [in population in Breconshire] has been in parishes formerly agricultural, since worked for coal or iron'¹², and went on to cite Llanelly parish as a prime example of this. An 1841 census enumerator's book noted that 'The great increase of population in the parish of Llanelly is attributed to the flourishing growth of the ironworks'¹³. The population density of the parish was 1,190 people per square

¹¹ Chris Evans, *The Labyrinth of Flames: Work and Social Conflict in Early Industrial Merthyr Tydfil* (University of Wales Press, 1993), pp. 13-14.

¹² Theophilus Jones, Glanusk Edition, Vol. I, p.10

¹³ 1841 Census, PRO, HO/107/1366

mile in 1851, up from 115 per square mile in 1801 (and 11 people per square mile in 1673, if the Compton census is to be believed).

This was a high growth rate, but the low base figure means the rise in absolute terms was 8,695, compared with the population of Merthyr Tydfil which rose sixfold between 1801 and 1851, but whose increase in absolute terms was 38,673, making it the largest town in Wales in 1851, with a population of 63,080.

The Monmouthshire Registration Districts contained numerous ironworks, most of which were bigger than the Clydach. Thus the rate of population in these more intensely industrialised areas was often higher than in Llanelly which, as well as being a parish, was itself a Registration Sub-District. The population of the Aberystroth Sub-District, which contained the Nantyglo, Ebbw Vale and Blaina works, increased seventeen and a half times, from 805 in 1801, to 14,383 in 1851. The population of the Tredegar Sub-District rose twenty-one times over, from 1,132 in 1801 to 24,544 in 1851. Indeed, all the Monmouthshire Registration Districts, with the exception of Blaenavon, had higher growth rates than Llanelly. Blaenavon managed a fourfold increase, from 1,469 in 1801, to 5,855 in 1851¹⁴.

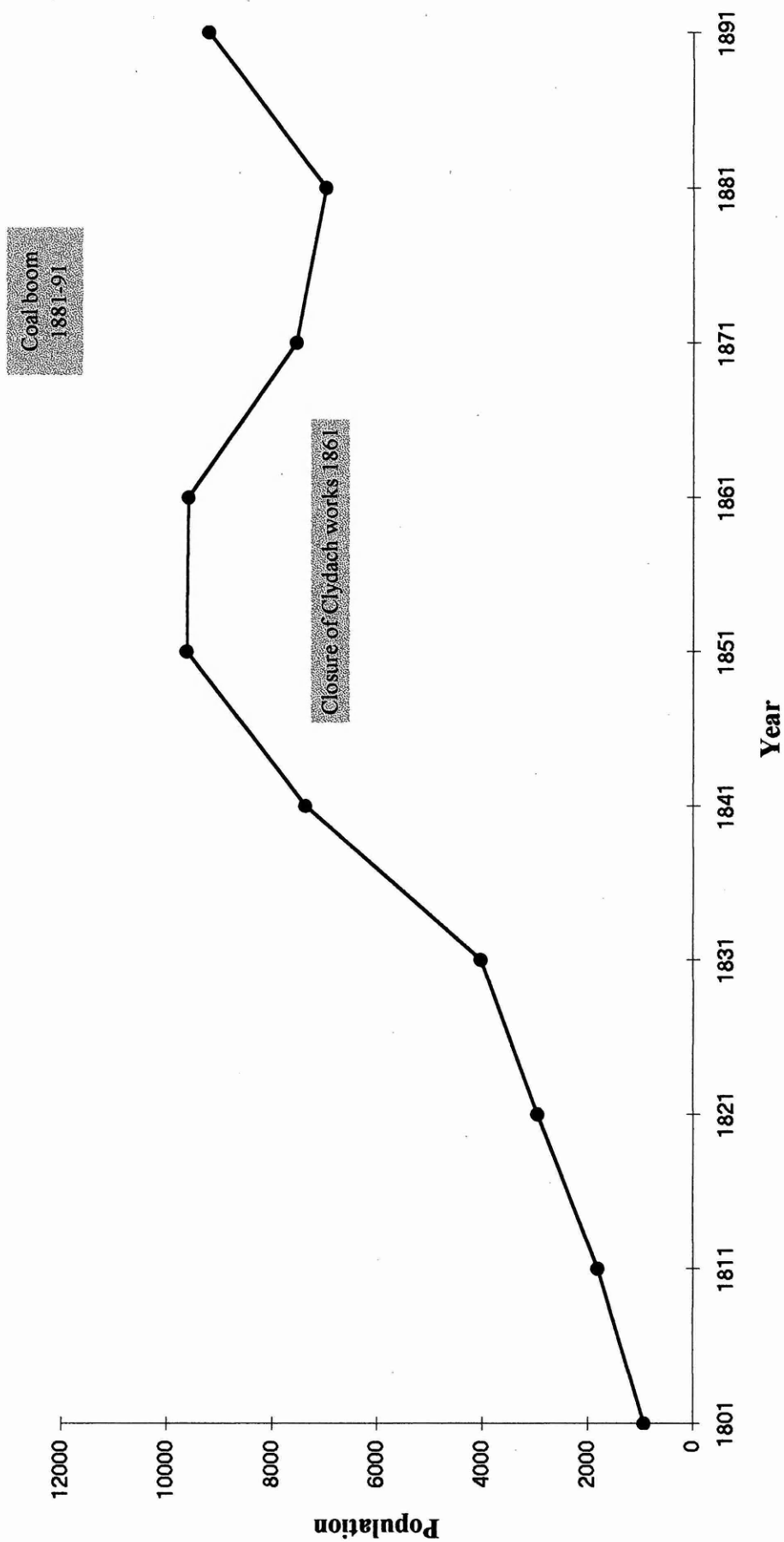
Professor Jones identifies the 1830s as the decade which saw the highest rate of migration to the Clydach and Brynmawr area¹⁵. W.E. Minchinton, on the other hand, writes that population growth was particularly marked in the industrial parishes of south Breconshire in the 1840s. Table 3.3 and fig. 3.2 below show that Jones is correct in relation to Llanelly parish (the highest absolute rise was in the decade to 1841; albeit the highest percentage rise was in the decade to 1811).

For the first three censuses the parish was divided into Aberbaiden and Maesygwartha, but thereafter was returned as a single unit. The Clydach Ironworks and Llanelly Hill were in Aberbaiden, which, as a result, was more heavily populated

¹⁴Figures in this paragraph are taken from Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, *The Valleys in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, (text of a lecture to the Standing Conference on the History of the South Wales Valleys, 1981), p.15

¹⁵D.J.V. Jones, *Before Rebecca: Popular Protest in Wales, 1793-1835*, (Allen Lane, 1973) p.87

Fig. 3.2 The population of Llanelly parish, 1801-91



than Maesygartha. In fact, by 1811 Aberbaiden was the most densely populated district of the 10 parishes in the Crickhowell Hundred.

Table 3.3 - Population of Llanelly Parish 1801-1851

Year	Aberbaiden	Maesygartha	Total	% rise	Absolute Increase
1801	608	329	937	---	
1811	1,097	724	1,821	94.3	884
1821	1,781	1,181	2,962	62.6	1,141
1831	---	---	4,041	36.4	1,079
1841	---	---	7,366	82.3	3,325
1851	---	---	9,632	30.8	2,266

Source: Abstract of returns, census 1801-1831; census enumerators' books, 1841 (PRO, HO/107/1366) and 1851 (PRO HO/107/2490).

In 1831, the two most densely populated parishes in the Crickhowell Hundred were the industrial ones of Llanelly, with 4,041, and Llangattock, with 2,690. The pressures of this rapidly expanding population brought about administrative changes. Until 1852, the parishes of Llanelly and Llangenny were perpetual curacies under the Rectorship of Llangattock, probably because historically they had been so thinly populated. In 1852, however, Llanelly was made an independent parish. Further change occurred in 1875, when the town of Brynmawr became an ecclesiastical parish in its own right (and a separate civil parish under the Local Government Act of 1894).

The population of the parish reached a peak in 1851. During the 1850s, the financial difficulties of the Clydach Ironworks became more acute. On 6th December 1857, the Reverend Thomas Lewis of Bethlehem Baptist Chapel, Maesygartha, wrote in his diary: 'The low state of trade tells fearfully on our collections. Great reductions have been made in the wages of workmen, and hundreds unemployed', and on Christmas Day, 1859, 'I leave because the works are likely to stop forever ... nearly all must go away, or remain behind and be very poor'¹⁶. Measured against this

¹⁶ Revd. T. Lewis, *My Life's History: The Autobiography of Revd. Thomas Lewis*, (Newport & Bristol, 1902) pp.52, 91

background, the population of the parish ceased to grow, and stood at 9,603 in 1861 (slightly less than the 1851 population).

The Clydach works were declared bankrupt in 1861. The population of the parish now entered a long term decline, and fell sharply in the 1860s, to stand at 7,541 in 1871. A note on the 1871 census was the exact antithesis of the note of 1841, quoted above: 'The decrease of population in the parish of Llanelly is attributed to the stoppage of the Clydach Ironworks'¹⁷. However, the closure of the Clydach works was set against a background of problems in the iron industry. The Hirwaun and Penydarren works also ceased operation in 1861, and the Beaufort works closed around the same time. The population of Llangattock parish (in which the Beaufort works lay) fell by an astonishing 83.12% from 5,739 in 1861, to 968 in 1891 (though account must be taken of the removal of part of Brynmawr from the parish in 1875). By 1871, a reduction in the number of furnaces at Blaenavon had caused population loss there too.

The reasons for these closures, which were the start of a general decline in the South Wales iron industry, were several. Iron ore on the northern outcrop was becoming more expensive to mine as the more accessible deposits became exhausted. In addition, South Wales was increasingly unable to compete with the exploitation from the 1850s of the Cleveland ironstone field¹⁸. The great advantage South Wales had, in terms of raw materials, was the high carbon content of its coal, resulting in cheaper fuel costs in the production process. This advantage was removed by the invention of the hot-air blast in 1828. (Another raw material, iron ore, was relatively poor in South Wales, so much so that the Cyfarthfa works imported ore from Barrow-in-Furness as early as 1811, and, in 1828, the Clydach works were charging their furnaces with a mix of local ironstone and ore from Lancashire)¹⁹.

¹⁷ 1871 Census, published population tables, vol. II, Division XI, Monmouthshire and South Wales, p. 549

¹⁸ M. Atkinson and C. Baber, *The Growth and Decline of the South Wales Iron Industry, 1760-1880*, (University of Wales Press, 1987) p. 12

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 26-7, 29-30

It was the advent of the steel industry that really marked the decline of the South Wales iron trade. The Bessemer and Siemens processes for the manufacture of steel, invented in the 1850s, required non-phosphoric pig iron, for which South Wales had to import haematite. The early advantages of siting plant on the northern outcrop had now all but disappeared. The metallurgical industries therefore relocated to the coast, where they were equally well placed for the export market.

Several of the South Wales ironworks made a successful transition to steel manufacture, these being the Dowlais, Ebbw Vale, Rhymney, Blaenavon, Tredegar, and Cyfarthfa works. It was an irony that, for a short time, South Wales was the leading steel producing area in the world²⁰. The remainder of the South Wales ironworks gradually closed down, however, not having the incentive or capital to convert to steel production. The Clydach works, after their initial failure, were partially revived under new forms of management, but closed permanently in 1877. This was once more part of a wider pattern, as the Nantyglo and Plymouth works had also shut by the mid-1870s. By the latter part of that decade, only half of the remaining South Wales furnaces were in blast.²¹

The depopulation of local iron manufacturing parishes was part of a 'massive shift of population within the coalfield'²² as the focus of industrial activity, and hence population, moved to the coal mining valleys of Rhondda, Ogmore, Garw and Afan, and the coastal steelworking centres of Newport, Cardiff, Port Talbot and Llanwern.

In contrast to the Llanelly parish, the continued industrial development of the Monmouthshire Registration Sub-Districts, through coal mining and steel, was evident in the census returns. Between 1851 and 1881 the population of Aberystwith grew by 29.82%, that of Tredegar by 41.32%, and Blaenavon by 61.38%.

²⁰ Atkinson and Baber, p. 13

²¹ Ibid., p. 13

²² P.N.Jones, *Mines, Migrants and Residence in the South Wales Steamcoal Valleys: the Ogmore and Garw Valleys in 1881*, (Hull University Press, 1987) p.11

The Town of Brynmawr

By 1891, the population of Llanelly parish extraneous to Brynmawr was only 3,079, though the town itself had grown to 6,134. Much of the growth in parish population to 1861 had been attributable to the expansion of Brynmawr.

The settlement at Brynmawr began prior to 1820, when workers started to build their own houses along a ready-made street pattern of tramroads that linked Nantyglo Ironworks with coal and iron ore gathering grounds to the north. The nucleus of a settlement arose, fronting the Merthyr to Abergavenny coach road. Because the location was a wide, open hilltop, at the convergence of several valleys leading into industrial Monmouthshire, it was both favourably central, and had room to expand (unlike the narrow linear settlements in the Gorge itself). Tradesmen and speculative builders added greatly to the town's expansion in the 1820s and 30s, aided by the fact that the coach road was the quickest route onto the coalfield from the English border counties.

The town's population in 1847 was around 5,500²³, which would have meant a population of approximately 4,100 in the remainder of the parish. In 1871, the total population of the Llanelly Registration Sub-District (coterminous with the parish) was 7,541, of which 4,208 were resident in the Brynmawr Local Board district, and 3,333 in the remainder of the parish. Moreover, a further 1,531 of the townspeople lived within the Llangattock Registration Sub-District, bringing the town's total population to 5,739²⁴.

Between 1871 and 1891, the population of Llanelly parish extraneous to Brynmawr was fairly static, falling slightly from 3,333 to 3,079. Its decline was probably arrested by the expansion of the South Wales steamcoal industry from the 1880s, particularly after the Monmouthshire collieries became accessible by rail from

²³ Education Commission, PP 1847, XXVII, pp. 62-3.

²⁴ Dr Gwynne Harries, Report on the Prevalence of Enteric Fever in part of the Sub-district of Llanelly Brecknockshire, September 1872: Report of the Local Government Board, 2nd annual report, 1872, PP, 1873, XXIX, Appendices 41, 42, and 65. Detailed census statistics are not available for Brynmawr prior to this period, as it was simply returned as part of Llanelly parish.

the 1860s. Jennings notes an increase in the use of the Brynmawr and Llanelly areas as dormitory towns for men employed in the Monmouthshire collieries from 1881-1891, aided by the fact that so little local housing was company-built, there were no ties through accommodation to a particular employer²⁵.

Of all the industrial settlements in Llanelly parish, Brynmawr was the only one to become a town. The others remained villages (Clydach), hamlets (Blackrock) or dispersed settlements without recognisable form (Llanelly Hill). Brynmawr's growth was sustained by the commercial prosperity that its location lent it, and also by the boom in steam coal and the development of local steelworks at Ebbw Vale, and Blaenavon (where the invention of the Gilchrist-Thomas process enabled local phosphoric ores to be used in steel manufacture). There was also an influx of Eastern European and other tradesmen in the 1870s, so that Brynmawr developed a shopkeeping class of Jewish pawnbrokers and jewellers, and Scottish tradesmen, who were often drapers. These elements were not assimilated in the way Welsh and English in-migrants to the parish absorbed one another's cultures, and become indistinguishable. Whereas English and Welsh shared common occupations (mining) and religion (both were often Baptists), Irish, Jews, and Scots, practised different occupations and religions (Presbyterianism in the case of the Scots).

The Population of Llanelly Hill

In 1833, when the Clydach Ironworks was offered for sale, the particulars stated that Llanelly Hill consisted of 600 acres of coal and iron workings, with 48 workmen's houses, 2 counting houses, 2 agents' houses, a company shop, warehouse, and stables, plus the two farms of Penffyddlwn and Coed Cae Newydd which added a further 165 acres²⁶. This gives some indication of the size of the settlement, if not its actual population. By the 1851 census, the community had grown considerably, and a population of 1,822 occupied 379 houses, with a further 11 standing empty. The big

²⁵ Jennings, pp. 50 and 84

²⁶ Particulars of Sale of Clydach Ironworks, 1833, Gwent CRO, D.591.384

discrepancy in the number of houses between 1833 and 1851 is probably due to the fact that the sale particulars would only have listed company-owned houses, whereas much housing was worker-built.

The presence of 11 empty houses at the 1851 census suggests the population had at one stage been larger, and this would accord with the fall in population in the parish outside Brynmawr, as the Clydach works sustained financial losses in the 1840s.

Table 3.4 - Population of Llanelly Hill in 1851, together with houses inhabited and uninhabited

Area	Males	Females	Total	Houses Inhab.	Houses Uninhab.
Coed Cae Newydd	54	45	99	21	---
Waun Lapra	117	105	222	48	1
Mount Pleasant*	57	50	107	22	---
Darenfelen	302	297	599	129	3
Gellyfelen	260	233	493	102	5
Cwm Nant Gam	168	134	302	57	2
Total	958	864	1,822	379	11

* includes Glynsychnant and Penrhiw; Source: 1851 Census, PRO (HO/107/2490)

Most historians agree that the populations on the ironbelt were mobile, and their mobility was often prompted by what D.J.V. Jones called the 'fluctuating fortunes of collieries and ironworks'. Jones noted, for example that 'it was reported at the time of the depression of 1841 that 2,000 had left the parish of Trevethin'²⁷. Professor Gwyn Williams described it thus: 'All over the coalfield, workers were mobile, flitting from job to job, following the shifts of an unpredictable iron-coal complex'²⁸. As well as the decline of the Clydach works, there had been a slump in the iron trade around 1851 which itself caused out-migration from the iron districts. It was this slump that was blamed for the smaller than average congregations at the religious census of 1851²⁹.

²⁷D.J.V. Jones, p.88

²⁸Gwyn A. Williams, 'Locating a Welsh Working Class: the Frontier Years', in David Smith (Ed.), *A People and a Proletariat, Essays in the History of Wales 1780-1980*, (Pluto Press, 1980), p.25

²⁹Ieuan Gwynedd Jones & David Williams, *The Religious Census of 1851: The Calendar of Returns Relating to Wales*, vol.1 (South Wales) (Cardiff, 1976), introduction, p. xxvi

The cholera epidemic of 1847-8 may also have played a part. The outbreak caused an exodus of population from Merthyr Tydfil, and may have done the same on Llanelly Hill. Cholera broke out in Brynmawr and Beaufort in 1848, and by 1849 had caused membership of Beersheba Baptist Chapel on Llanelly Hill to rise to 250. Five years later, the danger averted, membership dropped to 92.

Table 3.5 - Llanelly Hill, places of birth, 1851, numbers and percentages of population

Place of birth	No.	%	Place of birth	No.	%
Breconshire, Llanelly parish	854	46.87	Worcestershire	4	0.22
Monmouthshire	295	16.19	Shropshire	3	0.16
Breconshire, other parishes	217	11.91	Hampshire	2	0.11
Herefordshire	95	5.21	Middlesex	2	0.11
Glamorgan	64	3.51	Liverpool	2	0.11
Carmarthenshire	59	3.24	Devon	2	0.11
Gloucestershire	39	2.14	Bristol	2	0.11
Somerset	30	1.65	Merioneth	1	0.05
Radnorshire	28	1.53	Cheshire	1	0.05
Cardiganshire	21	1.15	Yorkshire	1	0.05
Pembrokeshire	19	1.05	Durham	1	0.05
Denbighshire	13	0.71	Dorset	1	0.05
Flintshire	11	0.60	Northants.	1	0.05
Montgomeryshire	9	0.49	Kent	1	0.05
Staffordshire	8	0.44	Gosport town (?)	1	0.05
Wiltshire	6	0.33	Illegible	4	0.22
Anglesey	5	0.27	Unknown	15	0.82
Cornwall	5	0.27			
Total	--	--		1,822	99.93

Source: 1851 Census, PRO (HO/107/2490)

The growth in population over the period 1801 to 1841 came about mostly through in-migration to the parish, not natural growth. This in-migration was necessary because the thinly populated parish of the late eighteenth century did not have the manpower for the labour intensive iron and mining industries. In-migration would continue because the populations of the ironworks were not able to reproduce themselves in

sufficient numbers to maintain the workforce³⁰. Thus, in 1851, 53% of the population of Llanelly Hill had been born outside the parish.

In-migration to Llanelly Hill was intensely localised: 16% of the population had come from industrialised Monmouthshire, and 12% from parts of Breconshire other than Llanelly parish. Together, Monmouthshire and Breconshire accounted for three-quarters of Llanelly Hill's population. Those born in Monmouthshire had often come from Abergavenny, Llanfoist, or the irontowns of Nantyglo, Blaenavon, Tredegar and Blaina, all of which lay within a six mile radius of Llanelly Hill. Those who had been born in other Breconshire parishes were often from the industrial parishes of Llangattock and Llangynidr, within a similar radius. Some longer distance migration had occurred amongst migrants from Herefordshire, Glamorgan, and Carmarthenshire, collectively accounting for about 12% of the population. Many of these had come from areas with similar industries: Merthyr Tydfil in Glamorgan, Radstock on the Somerset coalfield, or the counties of Staffordshire (iron), Denbigh and Flint (coal), or Cornwall (tin mining).

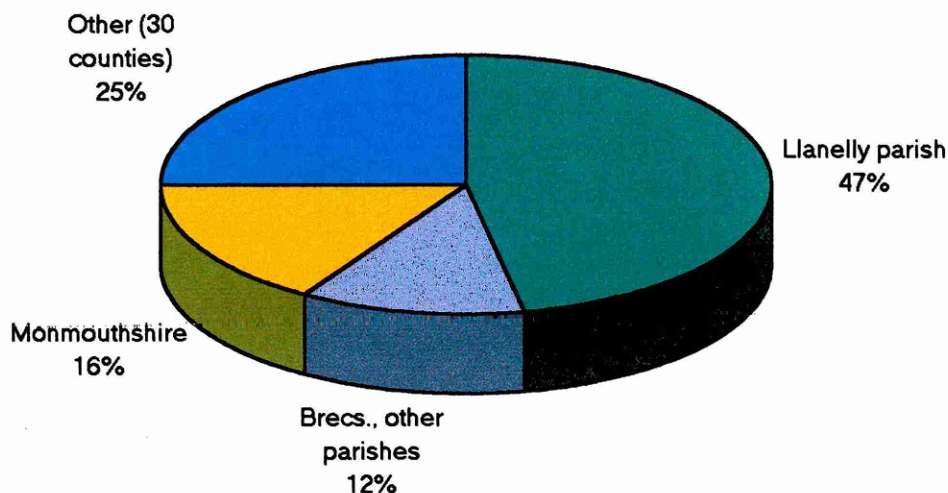
W.E. Minchinton confirms that most migration to the industrial parishes of south Breconshire was over a short distance. There were also migratory currents amongst agricultural labourers, attributable partly to reasons internal to agriculture, and partly to replace agricultural workers absorbed by the iron industry³¹.

The strong local bias of in-migration can be seen if comparisons are drawn with the Monmouthshire iron districts. In Bedwellty in 1851, 40% of the population came from Monmouthshire, with 60% having originated elsewhere. On Llanelly Hill in the same year, the proportions were reversed: 58.78% of the population were from Breconshire, with 41.22% coming from elsewhere. In the parishes of Bedwellty and Aberystroth in 1851, only 10% of household heads were born in the parish. On Llanelly Hill, 46.87% of the population as a whole had been born in the parish.

³⁰ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, *The Valleys in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, p.21

³¹ W.E. Minchinton, pp. 40-41

Fig. 3.3 Places of birth, Llanelly parish, 1851



The Clydach Ironworks was too small a concern to draw much long distance migration, since this would naturally be attracted to larger industrial and urban centres. Merthyr Tydfil in 1851 had high concentrations of workers from the neighbouring rural counties of Cardiganshire, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire³², but these were largely absent on Llanelly Hill, due to distance and the relative unimportance of the Clydach works (table 3.6). Only 5.4% of Llanelly Hill's population were born in west Wales, whereas 9.2% originated in the nearby English border counties, from which the most direct route onto the coalfield was the Abergavenny to Merthyr coach road, running through the Clydach Gorge. Migrants from Carmarthenshire, Cardiganshire and Pembrokeshire together accounted for only four more migrants than Herefordshire alone.

Distance also accounted for the high numbers of migrants on Llanelly Hill who had originated in Monmouthshire. The populations of the Monmouthshire iron towns of Blaenavon and Nantyglo lay no more than two or three miles from Llanelly Hill. In fact, the boundary between the Clydach, Nantyglo and Blaenavon ironworks was also the county border.

³²Harold Carter & Sandra Wheatley, *Merthyr Tydfil in 1851, A Study of the Spatial Structure of a Welsh Industrial Town*, (University of Wales Press, 1982), p.27

Table 3.6 - Llanelly Hill and Merthyr Tydfil: percentage of populations born in counties of west Wales, 1851

Area	Carmarthen	Pembroke	Cardigan	Total
Dowlais	30.4	13.9	13.9	58.2
N. Georgetown	26.8	13.2	3.1	43.1
Pentrebach	12.3	7.0	5.3	24.6
Llanelly Hill	3.24	1.04	1.15	5.43

Source: Carter & Wheatley, p.27 (for Merthyr Tydfil); 1851 census, PRO (HO/107/2490) (for Llanelly Hill). The Merthyr figures are based on heads of household only, while the Llanelly Hill figures comprise the total population.

Migration from Ireland had taken place to Abergavenny, where an Hibernian Society was founded in 1839³³, and to Brynmawr, where, in 1847, there were 'persons congregated from all parts of England and Wales, with a considerable number of Irish'³⁴. Yet there were no Irish migrants on Llanelly Hill. The reasons are probably social. Towns like Brynmawr had their ghettos, where Irish migrants were: 'compelled to segregate in their dwellings, for the Welsh will not reside amongst them'³⁵. Religious and cultural differences marked the Irish out: there were clashes in Brynmawr between St. Patrick's Day celebrants and Welsh Nonconformists³⁶, for example, and elsewhere Irish migrants were blamed for lowering wage rates and acting as blacklegs. Such an ostracised community would be attracted to a place like Brynmawr, many of whose inhabitants were 'outcasts from various parts of the country, who have committed offences elsewhere'³⁷. They would find the remainder of Llanelly parish less accommodating: 'they are generally quiet and well behaved' but 'dislike strangers and are consequently narrow minded'³⁸. Only in 1861 were there any Irish migrants living on Llanelly Hill, and these were almost certainly

³³ Jeremy K. Knight, 'Odd Fellows & Amicable Women: Friendly Societies in Nineteenth Century Industrial Monmouthshire', *Proceedings of the Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association*, vol. IV (1980), p.51

³⁴ Education Commission, PP, 1847, vol. XXVII, p.133

³⁵ Carter and Wheatley, p.28, quoting the Morning Chronicle, 15th April, 1850

³⁶ Hilda Jennings, *Brynmawr: a Study of a Distressed Area*, (Allenson, 1934), pp.51-2

³⁷ Education Commission, p.133

³⁸ Evidence of John Powell to Education Commission, Vol. XXVII, p.124, and of John Hughes, p. 98

remnants of the navvy gangs who built the Merthyr to Abergavenny railway that year. Those gangs had been 46% Irish-born, and had driven a tunnel through the mountain at Gellyfelen³⁹. Thirty remained behind on Llanelly Hill: twenty one lived at Gellyfelen; two were still railway labourers, and the remainder iron miners. They did not settle: all except three were lodgers, and by 1881 all trace of them had vanished.

With the closure of the Clydach works, the parish population fell outside of Brynmawr, from 1841 onwards. But whereas the parish at large had some other industries to rely on (mainly limestone quarries and limeworks at Blackrock and Clydach, and agriculture around Gilwern), Llanelly Hill had been wholly dependent on the ironworks. So, Llanelly Hill's population fell at a faster rate than that of the rest of the parish: by 36.4% from 1,822 in 1851 to 1,158 in 1891. As a result, in-migration tailed off, though it did not cease completely.

Table 3.7 - Llanelly Hill, places of birth, 1891, numbers and percentages of population

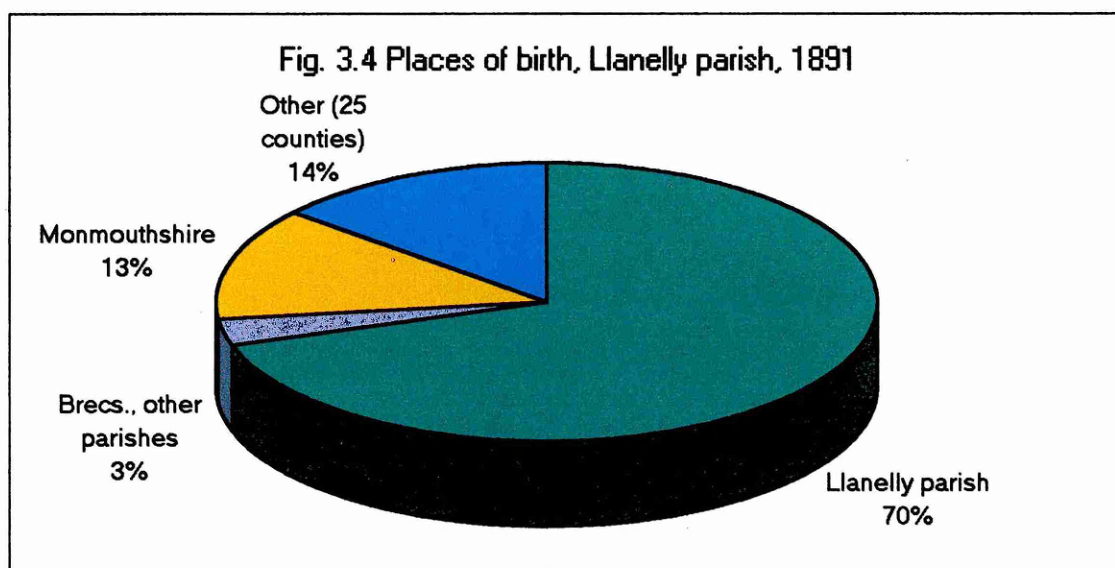
Place of birth	No.	%	Place of birth	No.	%
Breconshire, Llanelly parish	807	69.69	Northants.	3	0.26
Monmouthshire	147	12.69	Pembrokeshire	3	0.26
Breconshire, other parishes	36	3.11	Shropshire	3	0.26
Herefordshire	32	2.76	Liverpool	2	0.17
Glamorgan	24	2.07	London	2	0.17
Gloucestershire	19	1.64	Yorkshire	2	0.17
Wiltshire	14	1.21	Cornwall	1	0.09
Somerset	12	1.04	Dorset	1	0.09
Carmarthenshire	9	0.77	Flintshire	1	0.09
Staffordshire	7	0.60	Isle of Wight	1	0.09
Worcestershire	7	0.60	Montgomery	1	0.09
Devon	6	0.52	Oxfordshire	1	0.09
Radnor	5	0.43	Cardiganshire	1	0.09
America	4	0.34	Illegible	1	0.09
Lancashire	3	0.26	Unknown	3	0.26
Total	--	--		1,158	100

Source: 1891 Census, PRO (RG/12/4576)

³⁹ D. Brooke, *The Railway Navvy*, (David & Charles, 1983), quoted by Ernest Sandberg, 'Bala and Penllyn, The Demographic and Socio-Economic Structures of an Embryonic Welsh Town' (unpublished M.Phil thesis, Open University, 1995), p.329

In 1891, 85.5% of the population of Llanelly Hill had been born in Breconshire and Monmouthshire, compared with 75% forty years earlier. Longer distance migration (i.e. that originating from outside Breconshire and Monmouthshire) now accounted for 15% of the population, whereas in 1851 it had accounted for 25%. Moreover, 70% of the population in 1891 had been born in Llanelly parish, compared with only 47% in 1851. In-migration at the end of the century, albeit at a reduced rate, was probably prompted by the coal boom of the 1880s, and provided a respite to the dwindling population of Llanelly Hill and Llanelly parish alike.

Fig 3.4 shows the unmistakably local nature of in-migration in 1891.



Although the rate of in-migration had fallen, the origins of the population were strikingly similar in 1851 and 1891: the five most important sending areas were the same in both years (table 3.8), though migration from outside the parish was less in 1891. After these five main areas, the English border counties had gained a little by 1891, displacing counties such as Carmarthenshire and Radnorshire, but the percentages involved here were small.

Table 3.8 - Migration to Llanelly Hill, 1851 and 1891, percentages of population from main sending counties

	1851	1891
Breconshire, Llanelly parish	46.87	69.69
Monmouthshire	16.19	12.69
Breconshire other parishes	11.91	3.11
Herefordshire	5.21	2.76
Glamorgan	3.51	2.07
Total	83.69	90.32

Source: 1851 census, PRO (HO/107/2490) and 1891 census, PRO (RG/12/4576)

The 1851 census for Llanelly Hill recorded a wife whose husband had 'gone away to America', leaving her with three children. The 1891 census contains further evidence that emigration had been taking place to America, by the inclusion of families where one or more of the children were born in America, but the parents were local (born in Llanelly parish, or Monmouthshire). These, presumably, were emigrants who decided to return. How many went abroad and decided to stay is a matter beyond the parameters of the present study.

By 1891, there were also signs of step-migration having taken place, as the birthplaces of children record a family's movements from one location to another (evidence of such migration is scant in the 1851 census and only limited in 1891). The clearest example on Llanelly Hill in 1891 was a family where the husband was born in Breconshire, the wife in Carmarthenshire, and the children in Merthyr Tydfil and Ferndale in the Rhondda.

There were other indications that Llanelly Hill was now a community in decline. The percentage of households with lodgers – a sign not only of in-migration rates to an area, but also of its low socio-economic standing⁴⁰ - fell from 21.11% in 1851 to 9.79% in 1891. Similarly, the percentage of households with visitors staying fell from 9.76% in 1851 to 2.04% in 1891. Because so many visitors had the same surname as the head of household, or shared a common place of birth, and because so many had local type occupations, such as coal or iron miner, the term 'visitor', may be

⁴⁰ According to Carter & Wheatley, see: pp. 27, 32, 60, 64 & 68

misleading in the modern sense, and may be more representative of chain- or step-migration taking place, as in-migrants followed in the footsteps of their friends or relatives.

A further indication of dwindling rates of in-migration is the disparity in the ratio of men to women. An expanding mining community usually had a bias towards young single males. Thus, many early in-migrants to the Brynmawr area were males under forty years of age: either single men, or men whose families would follow later⁴¹. The ratio of men to women in Llanelly parish reflected the decline of industry, and fell as follows (as a yardstick, the ratio of men to women in Breconshire was 96 to 100 in 1811):

1811	119 men to 100 women
1831	117 men to 100 women
1861	111 men to 100 women
1871	106 men to 100 women

On Llanelly Hill the ratio of men to women was 111 to 100 in 1851, which compares with a ratio of 136 to 100 in the expanding coal mining valleys of Ogmore and Garw in 1881. Strangely, the ratio widened on Llanelly Hill, so by 1891 there were 122 men to 100 women. This was probably the result of a recent increase in in-migration in 1891, caused by the growth of the coal industry noted earlier.

If the population of Llanelly Hill is considered in life cycle stages, the 1851 population showed a numerical bias towards males at all stages, except amongst the elderly, and it was amongst children (aged 0-14) and young adults (15-29), and to a lesser extent the early middle aged (30-44) where the most noticeable bias occurred. By 1891, there had been a contraction of the young adult and early middle age groups, and an expansion of those in later middle age and the elderly, symptomatic of an

⁴¹ H. Jennings, *Brynmawr: the Study of a Distressed Area*, p.31

ageing community where in-migration of the young had fallen off. These differences should not be unduly emphasised, however, as the changes were not great. The age and sex structure of the Llanelly Hill population for both years is given in Appendix III.

Chapter 4

Employment

The Occupational Structure of Breconshire

Breconshire was a mainly agricultural county at the beginning of the nineteenth century. At the 1801 census, 14,346 persons were chiefly employed in agriculture, 4,204 in trade, manufacture and handicrafts, and 19,228 in other areas¹. The 1811 census, which dealt with families rather than individuals, recorded 4,467 families employed in agriculture, 2,239 in trade etc., and 1,013 in other areas².

Agriculture remained the single largest employer at mid-century: in 1851, 8,171 males and 1,748 females were employed in agriculture, but by now the second largest employer was mining and quarrying, employing 3,548 males but only 101 females³. The employment pattern of the county was described thus: 'The population of the district is chiefly engaged in agriculture, and in the various employments connected with the manufacture of iron, but very recently copper and lead mines have been opened in the upper part of the county ... hitherto considered solely agricultural'⁴.

Though it remained a major source of employment, agriculture declined in importance, employing 7,193 males and 543 females in 1871, and 5,991 males and 379 females in 1891⁵. Numbers employed in mining and quarrying also fell due to the collapse of the iron industry (which relied on mining and quarrying activities) to 2,679 males and 107 females in 1871, but rose again, probably due to the subsequent expansion of the coal mining industry, to 3,092 males and 18 females in 1891⁶.

¹ John Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, vol.1, Welsh Office, 1985, p.103. The 1801 figures are said not to be very reliable.

² Ibid.

³ Williams, vol. 1, p. 107

⁴ The Newspaper Press Directory, 1851, p.272

⁵ Williams, vol.1, p.107

⁶ Ibid.

The Crickhowell Hundred (which contained the industrial parishes of Breconshire) had 3,248 men over the age of twenty in 1831. The occupational structure of this workforce (plus females employed as domestic servants) can be compared with that of England and Wales in the same year (table 4.1). This data reveals the importance of non-agricultural labouring (including mining and much of iron working) as a local source of employment. It shows also the nature of much Welsh farming, where small-scale hillfarms were typically farmed by a single family, not employing labourers. The difference between employed agricultural labourers in Crickhowell (9.46%) and England & Wales (20.05%) is striking.

Table 4.1 - Occupational structure of male population over 20, Crickhowell Hundred compared with England & Wales, 1831,

	Crickhowell No. (%)	England & Wales No. (%)
Agriculture:-		
Occupiers employing labourers	142 (3.91)	161,188 (4.04)
Occupiers not employing labourers	174 (4.8)	114,849 (2.88)
Employed labourers	343 (9.46)	799,875 (20.05)
Labourers not employed in agriculture (including miners)	1,537(42.42)	532,521 (13.35)
Employed in manufacture	139 (3.83)	320,324 (8.03)
Employed in retail trade or handicraft	652 (17.99)	1,007,403 (25.26)
Servants (male)	85 (2.34)	104,730 (2.62)
Servants (female)	375 (10.35)	560,979 (14.06)
Other males, not servants	96 (2.64)	200,569 (5.02)
Capitalists, bankers and professionals	80 (2.20)	185,187 (4.64)
Total	3,623 (99.94)	3,987,625 (99.95)

Source: 1831 census abstract, PP, 1831, XVIII.

Because of an absence of proper towns (the Hundred contained only Crickhowell and the developing township of Brynmawr) the manufacturing and retail sectors were particularly small. Most of the Hundred comprised areas of low socio-economic

standing, in the main small farmers or industrial workers, and so the professional sector was small, as was the proportion of female domestic servants.

The Occupational Structure of Llanelly Parish

The parish of Llanelly in the eighteenth century was agricultural, though with some small-scale industry. From the 1790s, iron manufacture made a rapid impact on the occupational structure. The marriage registers between 1801 and 1811 recorded the occupations of men marrying: there were 51 in this period, of whom 31 had industrial occupations, 6 agricultural, and 14 whose occupations may have been either.

Table 4.2 - Occupations of men marrying, Llanelly parish, 1801-11

Industrial	Agricultural	Either
16 Miners	5 Yeomen	9 Labourers
8 Colliers	1 Farmer	2 Blacksmiths
2 Puddlers		2 Carriers
1 Moulder		1 Carpenter
1 Hammerman		
1 Rollerwoman		
1 Coker		
1 Mineral Agent		

Source: Llanelly parish registers, Gwent CRO

Industry quickly overtook agriculture as an employer. For censuses between 1801-31 the parish was divided between Aberbaiden (where the iron industry was located) and Maesygartha (which was the agricultural part). Table 4.3 below shows the numbers and percentages (in parenthesis) of those employed in the various economic sectors in the two parochial divisions.

In 1801, employment in Maesygartha was still predominantly agricultural (87.39%), whereas Aberbaiden was already heavily industrialised (82.46% employed in trade and manufacture). Aberbaiden was also more heavily populated, as is apparent from the above figures, and the data considered in the population chapter. By 1811, the situation had changed dramatically, and 78.52% of the inhabitants of Maesygartha were now employed in trade and manufacture.

Table 4.3 - Employment in Aberbaiden and Maesygartha, 1801-31

Year	Sector	Aberbaiden No. (%)	Maesygartha No. (%)
1801	Agriculture	70 (17.54)	104 (87.39)
	Trade & Manufacture	329 (82.46)	15 (12.60)
1811	Agriculture	51 (24.06)	25 (16.78)
	Trade & Manufacture	161 (75.94)	117 (78.52)
	Other	----	7 (4.70)
1821	Agriculture	28 (8.64)	29 (12.72)
	Trade & Manufacture	284 (87.65)	187 (82.02)
	Other	12 (3.70)	12 (5.26)
1831	Agriculture		47 (6.03)
	Trade & Manufacture		207 (26.54)
	Other		526 (67.44)

Source: Printed abstracts of census, 1801-31, PP, 1812, XI, 1822, XV and XXI, 1831, XXXVI-XXXVIII

From 1811 onwards, trade and manufacture employed the bulk of the population in each division, with agriculture steadily declining in importance. The 'other' category was a residual one, for all those whose occupations did not fall into agriculture or trade and manufacture. At the 1831 census, this residual category rose to 67%, but must be taken to include occupations previously assigned to trade and manufacture, since census abstracts of that year state that 700 men were employed in coal mining and quarrying in the parish, and 126 men at the ironworks (more than Merthyr's Penydarren works, which employed only 110 men at this time).

The line between agricultural and industrial employment quickly blurred. Local farmers were keen to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the iron industry, and many became carriers, transporting limestone, coal, and bar iron by trains of pack mule. As a result, rents for grassland in Llangattock and Llanelly parishes became extremely dear, as the tenants were charged high rates for the pasturage for their mules and horses. But by the first decade of the century, this trade was already declining because of the construction of tramroads linking industrial sites with the Brecon to Abergavenny Canal⁷.

⁷ Revd. Henry Thomas Payne, material collected towards a history of Breconshire, (NLW, Minor Deposits, 187A), p.33

Coal and Iron Mining on Llanelly Hill

In 1848, Samuel Lewis wrote of Llanelly parish: '[it] abounds with mineral wealth of various kinds, in procuring and manufacturing which the inhabitants are principally employed'⁸. The Clydach Iron Company raised an 'immense quantity of coal'⁹, and it was with this, and the excavation of iron ore, that the workforce on Llanelly Hill was almost exclusively concerned.

In 1842, the Clydach Ironworks employed 1,352 people, of whom 447 were employed at the ironworks themselves and 905 in the mines¹⁰. In 1851, the working population of Llanelly Hill had fallen to 831, probably because of the outward flow of population from the parish in the 1840s as the Clydach works sustained losses.

Table 4.4 shows the occupations found on Llanelly Hill in 1851, together with the numbers employed in those occupations. From this, it can be seen that 88% of the workforce was engaged in mining or related activities, with the two biggest occupations being iron and coal mining, which together accounted for 479 people, or 57.64% of the working population. There were marginally more iron than coal miners since, although coal was consumed in greater quantities, iron ore was harder to mine. In 1825, typical quantities involved in the production process were: 311 tons of coal and 223 tons of mine (iron ore) weighed at Clydach's two furnaces, which together produced 85 tons of pig iron¹¹.

Because iron ore was harder to mine, employers were inclined to keep iron miners in employment during recessions, but to lay coal miners off. This meant that coal mining was a more precarious form of employment – a factor which seems to have made coal miners feckless:

⁸ Samuel Lewis, p.10

⁹ Samuel Lewis, p.10

¹⁰ W.E. Minchinton, 'The Place of Brecknock in the Industrialisation of South Wales, 1780-1980', *Brycheiniog*, VII, 1961, p.21

¹¹ Week ending 17th September 1825: John Lloyd, *Early History of the Old South Wales Ironworks*, (London, 1906), p.196

Table 4.4 - Occupations on Llanelly Hill, 1851

Mining and related		Service	
Iron miners	252	Domestic servants	27
Coal miners	227	Launderess/washerwoman	4
Hauliers	69	Charwoman	1
Coal and mine fillers	55	Errand girl	1
Labourers at coal and iron mines	42		33
Labourers (unspecified)	32		(3.97%)
Tippers	8		
Ostlers	7		
Stokers	7		
Mine burners/cleaners	6	Craftsmen	
Engineers	4	Blacksmiths	7
Incline hitchers	3	Masons	5
Road cleaners	3	Carpenters	2
Blocklayers	3		14 (1.68%)
Navigators	2		
Excavators	2		
Quarrymen	2		
Markers	2		
Mineral agent	1	Agriculture	
Engine tender	1		2
Machine weigher	1	Agricultural labourers	1
Banksman	1	Farm bailiff	3
Doorkeeper	1		(0.36%)
Coker's woman (?)	1		
	732		
	(88.09%)	Professional	
			1
Trade and Manufacture		Baptist minister	1
		Harper	2
Dressmakers	13		(0.24%)
Cordwainers	6		
Grocers	4		
Beer retailers	4	Residual	
Tailors	3		
Butchers	2	Paupers/parish relief	8
Shoemaker	1	Illegible	5
Huxter	1		13 (1.56%)
	34		
	(4.09%)		
Total			831

Source: 1851 census, PRO (HO/107/2490)

Ironstone mining ... was a more regular employment than coalmining and so it was always the case that ironminers were better off than coalminers even though their rate of wages was rather less. Contemporaries were all agreed that as a class of workmen ironminers were steadier, thriftier, better behaved, more sober, better husbands and fathers than coalminers - in short, more respectable¹².

Or, as a contemporary observer had it:

As a class the miners are the most provident, temperate, and best affected towards their masters; they are also the most regular in their work. During the first and second weeks after their monthly 'pay', the colliers work only about two-thirds of their time, the remainder is spent in idleness and by many in drunkenness¹³.

Differences in outlook or attitude were marked between the semi-skilled mining population of Llanelly Hill, and the fully skilled ironworkers in Clydach village:

There were two separate and distinct divisions of the population - the ironworks in the valley and the mines on the hill. There was nothing in common between them and they almost looked upon each other as belonging to a different race of people. Occasionally when they came into contact, breaches of the peace took place, which would have to be settled before the magistrates at Crickhowell.¹⁴

¹²Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, *Explorations and Explanations, Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales*, (Gomer Press, 1981), p.283

¹³ J. Ginswick (Ed.), *Labour and the Poor in England and Wales: Correspondents to the Morning Chronicle*, vol.III, North Wales - South Wales (Frank Cass, 1983), pp.100-101

¹⁴ Jordan, (n. pag.).

In terms of pay, which was by weight for miners, piece rates per ton in 1844-49 were typically 4s for ironstone, 1s 6¹/₂d for large coal, 9d for mixed coal, and 5³/₄d for slack or small coal¹⁵. The greater price for ironstone was designed to compensate for the difficulties in winning it, but table 4.5 shows that a coal miner generally earned more because he could cut greater quantities. Table 4.5 also shows the higher wages earned by skilled ironworkers. Wages had fallen between 1837 and 1841 because of a recession in the iron industry, which would culminate in strike in Merthyr Tydfil in 1842. Miners' wages on Llanelly Hill in 1841 had undergone a recent fall from about 20s per week to 18.

Table 4.5 - Average weekly wages, various occupations, 1837 and 1841

	1837	1841
	£.s.d	£.s.d
Iron puddler	1.10.0	1.8.6
Refiner	1.13.0	1.8.0
Coal miner	1.2.6	1.2.0
Blacksmith	0.18.6	0.18.6
Iron miner	0.19.7	0.17.3
Carpenter	0.17.6	0.17.0

Source: Children's Employment Commission, 1842, PP, XV

These wages can be compared with the remuneration received by the management of the Clydach works, and with wages in agriculture, albeit at differing times. In 1829-30, the salaries of the managers at Clydach were as follows:

John Scale	Manager	£500
Edward Frere		£300
Joshua Morgan	Cashier & Bookkeeper	£250
Robert Smith	Mineral Agent	£150
William Vaughan	Mill Agent	£115

¹⁵ L.B. Collier, *History & Development of the South Wales Coal Industry, 1750-1850*, Parts I & II (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 1941), p.73

Launcelot Powell	Furnace Manager	£100
George Frere	Forge Manager	£100
William Edwards	Clerk	£92
Huw Griffiths	Assistant Furnace Manager	£70
Robert Smith, junior	Assistant Mineral Agent	£50
Thomas Jones	Weigh Machine	£39

Edward Frere's salary was in consideration of advice and assistance given to Scale, as required, and for not engaging in the iron trade elsewhere. Most of the above named also received benefits in kind, usually a house, and payment of the taxes thereon, coal, the keeping of a cow, and, in Scale's case, the keeping of a horse and pony¹⁶.

In relation to agricultural labourers, Payne, writing between 1801 and 1811, gives the weekly wages of hired servants as follows:

Labourers, found in meat and drink	from 6 to 7 shillings
Labourers, finding themselves	from 9 to 12 shillings
Boys	from 3 to 6 shillings

It is not possible to compare directly the wages of underground workers in 1837 with those of agricultural labourers in the first decade of the century, but Payne indicates that the wages of husbandmen had been thrown 'very far into the background' by those of persons employed in 'mining, collieries, lime kilns, iron works, canals and railways'¹⁷.

Miners could generally expect to be paid more than agricultural workers throughout the course of the century. Higher wages were often what induced

¹⁶ 'An account of salaries, allowances and gratuities to managers and agents to year ending Lady Day, 1829', and 'Clydach salaries, c.1830', (Maybery, 1968 and 1970).

¹⁷ Revd. Henry Thomas Payne, material collected towards a history of Brecknockshire, p.54 (NLW, Minor Deposits, 187A). Payne, 1759-1832, was a cleric and ecclesiastical historian, curate at Llanelly c.1784, and then rector at nearby Llanbedr 1793. Later Archdeacon of Carmarthen, he died at Crickhowell: Dictionary of Welsh Biography, p.743.

migration from rural to industrial areas, whether permanent or seasonal. The local position in 1894, was that:

There is a tendency amongst the young men to go up to the mineral districts, but the agricultural labourer generally comes back again. He does not like the work underground, although he is well paid for it¹⁸.

This migration created a labour shortage in agricultural areas which in turn caused agricultural wages to increase¹⁹.

Early on, the wages of coal and iron miners were paid by the contractor who hired them, and this applied to other areas of the iron industry:

... the Clydach Works represents a transitional form of business organisation. The manager did not directly control the whole operation of the works but sub-contracted to particular workmen (the carpenter, the furnace-men etc.) who in turn recruited and paid the workmen under their control²⁰.

In mining, such contractors were commonly known as 'butties', though locally they were called 'doggies' (a term also used in Staffordshire). The doggy accepted a commercial risk, such as agreeing to sink a shaft, or produce so many tons of minerals, in return for a profit. The system was open to abuse by unscrupulous contractors and often operated to the disadvantage of the hired workman. Miners on Llanelly Hill in 1833 were hired by doggies, to whom they submitted accounts for tons of minerals cut, and yards of hard heading driven²¹. The butty system generally died out around mid-century, though it persisted until later in Staffordshire and the East

¹⁸ Evidence of Sir Joseph Bailey to Royal Commission on Land in Wales, 7th May, 1894, Minutes of Evidence, vol.III, p.767

¹⁹ Major E. Lister, evidence to Royal Commission on Land, 13th March, 1894, Minutes of Evidence, vol.II, p.768

²⁰ Minchinton, p.19

²¹ Merthyr Guardian, March, 1834. Hard headings were tunnels driven through rock.

Midlands. Legislation ruled out certain abuses associated with the system, such as the Coal Mines Regulation Act of 1872 which banned the payment of wages in public houses. A change from pillar-and-stall to the longwall method of mining also weakened the system, and led to a growth in ancillary occupations, such as 'more night-men, timbermen and roadmen'²² who carried out repairs during the nightshift. These changes were evident in the 1891 census for Llanelly Hill, which recorded a timberman and a woodman (table 4.6). Other changes of personnel by 1891 included the colliery manager and two colliery clerks, introduced by the Coal Mines Regulations Acts of 1872 and 1887.

Also evident was a drop in the number of hauliers, blacksmiths and ostlers, between 1851 and 1891, with the number of hauliers falling significantly from 69 to 8. This probably marked a movement away from horses and donkeys to transport coal and iron ore, and a greater use of steam power for haulage, marked by the introduction of occupations in 1891 such as engineers and an engine driver, and the stoker of a colliery boiler.

By far the most significant change in mining between 1851 and 1891 was the closure of the Clydach Ironworks, and the disappearance of iron mining as a form of employment. The number of iron miners on Llanelly Hill fell as follows:

1851	252
1861	155
1871	100
1881	3
1891	0

²² Lewis Browning, *Blaenavon, Monmouthshire: a Brief Historical Sketch*, (Minerva, 1906) p.23

Table 4.6 - Occupations on Llanelly Hill, 1891

Mining and related		Trade and manufacture	
Coal miners	320	Dressmakers	10
Labourers at coal mines	15	Grocers	5
Labourers (unspecified)	9	Boot/shoemakers	5
Hauliers	8	Innkeepers	2
Platelayers	5	Tea dealer	1
Engineers	3	Shop assistant	1
Firemen	3		24
Doorboys	3		(5.32%)
Mineweighers	2		
Hitchers	2	Agriculture	
Colliery clerks	2	Farm labourers	4
Colliery manager	1	Farmer	1
Sinker	1	Farm crofter	1
Stoker	1	Farmer/butcher	1
Woodman	1		7
Timberman	1		(1.55%)
Ostler	1		
Engine driver	1		
	379	Professional	
	(84.03%)	Schoolteachers	3
		Schoolboard officer	1
		Assurance agent	1
			5
			(1.12%)
Service		Craftsmen	
Domestic servants	26	Blacksmith	1
Post boy	1	Mason	1
	27	Mason's apprentice	1
	(5.99%)		3
			(0.66%)
		Residual	
		Infirm/crippled	2
		Parish relief	1
		Dependent on relatives	1
			4
			(0.88%)
Total			451

Source: 1891 Census, PRO (RG/12/4576)

When those employed in related occupations, such as fillers, hauliers, mine cleaners and burners, are included, the total employed in extracting iron dropped from 184 in 1861, to 108 in 1871.

Between about 1860 and 1880 there was an economic depression across the South Wales ironbelt, marking a hiatus between the decline of the iron industry and the start of the boom in steam coal. In 1860, the South Wales coalfield produced 10 million tons of coal per annum. Production doubled by 1880, and peaked at roughly 57 million tons in 1913. The size of the workforce on Llanelly Hill almost halved from 831 in 1851 to 451 in 1891, but the number of coal miners rose from 227 to 320, or from 27% to 70% of the workforce. Many worked in nearby Blaenavon, but from 1881-91 there was an increased use of the Brynmawr area as a dormitory town for men working in the Monmouthshire collieries, now accessible by rail²³.

In 1887, Llanelly Hill was described thus:

a population little over a thousand, and nearly all the same class of people, as far as occupation is concerned, that is coal miners, employed chiefly at Blaenavon on the other side of the mountain in the County of Monmouth, also at Waenavon slope and Clydach collieries, on the brow of Llanelly Hill, the two latter places being steam coal collieries. The out-put is trucked to various sea ports with the exception of house coal supply²⁴.

In 1891, 84.03% of the working population of Llanelly Hill were employed in mining, which meant that overall the occupational structure had changed little since 1851, when the figure was 88.09%.

²³ Jennings, p.50.

²⁴ William Luther, *Llanelly Hill and its Antiquities*, (n. pub., 1887) p.1

The Employment of Women and Children

In 1842, the Children's Employment Commission reported more cases of children working underground in South Wales than in any other district. The Clydach Ironworks employed 905 people in its mines on Llanelly Hill, including 188 boys and 67 girls under the age of 18, of whom 82 of the boys, and 22 of the girls, were younger than 13. Collier, in his study of the development of the South Wales coalfield²⁵, states that child labour was more prevalent in the iron districts than in coal mining areas, and that the Clydach works was one of the worst employers of child labour, much of it female. The reliance on young female labour was confirmed by evidence given to the Commission: 'there are a great many girls working underground here'²⁶. One redeeming feature of the Clydach works seems to be that its child labourers were relatively well-treated: they were not required to draw trams by girdle and chain, for example, and their conditions were said to be better than one witness's previous workplace in Shropshire²⁷. Their employment pattern was fairly usual: small children kept airdoors, older boys became hauliers, whilst older girls filled trams (though in 1841, 6 girls were actually cutting coal).

Families were under considerable financial pressure to put their children to work. When the Mines & Collieries Bill was passing through Parliament, the legal journal *The Justice of the Peace* observed:

these are not times in which laboring families can afford to lose the wages (by no means inconsiderable) raised by their children ... girls thrown out of work must resort to the parish for aid ... and as the poor laws [as interpreted by the Poor Law Commissioners] ... prohibit the reception of children into the workhouse without their parents whole families would thus be thrown on to the parish²⁸.

²⁵ Collier, p.79

²⁶ Richard Painter's evidence to the Children's Employment Commission, PP, 1842, vol. xv

²⁷ Painter, evidence to Children's Employment Commission.

²⁸ *The Justice of the Peace*, 28th May 1842, vol VI, no.21, p.132,

When the Bill became law in 1842, it prohibited boys under 10 and women of any age from working underground. How far it was observed is a matter of conjecture. It is sometimes supposed that the Act was widely disregarded, but not all contemporary commentators thought so:

Nowhere ... are women permitted to work in the mines and 'the statute [is] most rigorously observed; though the temptation to break it - so great is the competition of females for labour - must be considerable²⁹.

The unlawful employment of children was harder to detect:

[The Act was] rigorously carried out by the ironmasters and owners of collieries ... but with regard to boys under 10 years of age, the parents, anxious to avail themselves of their assistance in support of the family, deceive the agents by misstatements of the ages of their sons³⁰.

Legislation gradually had its desired effect. The 1851 census for Llanelly Hill recorded 6 boys under the age of 10 employed as coal or iron miners. This employment would have been illegal, unless the iron miners amongst them worked on the surface at the opencast or 'patch' mine at Cwm Nant Gam. The youngest underground workers in 1851 were aged 8 (in 1841, the youngest age had been 6). By 1891, the youngest coal miner on Llanelly Hill was 12 – now the statutory minimum age³¹.

Probably the single most profound change to employment patterns on Llanelly Hill, other than the closure of the Clydach works, was the removal of women from the

²⁹ Ginswick, p.100

³⁰ Ginswick, p.31

³¹ By the Coal Mines Regulation Acts of 1872 and 1887.

mining workforce. Girls tended to be employed in heavy manual work until their early twenties, when marriage and a family prevented them working outside the home. Arthur Munby witnessed girls at the Blaenavon works in 1865 breaking up ironstone with sledgehammers, 'All were young' he commented, 'and all, or nearly all unmarried'³². 'If it wasn't for the girls here' admitted an overlooker at Blaenavon 'I don't know what the ironworks would do'³³. Greenhow also commented on the employment of women, especially unmarried women, above ground in the Merthyr Tydfil and Abergavenny areas in 1861³⁴.

The dependence on female labour was widespread. At Merthyr in 1850, the Dowlais works employed 180 women, the Plymouth works 175, Cyfarthfa 150, and Pen-y-Darren an estimated 120³⁵. In 1851, 63.08% of working women on Llanelly Hill, or 82 out of a total of 130, were employed in the mining industry ³⁶.

Table 4.7 - Female occupations on Llanelly Hill, 1851

Mining and related		Trade and manufacture	
Fillers	47	Dressmakers	13
Labourers at coal and iron works	12	Beer retailer	1
Tippers	8	Huxter	1
Mine stokers	4		15
Road cleaners	3		
Incline hitches	2		
Mine pickers/cleaners	2		
Labourers (unspecified)	2	Service	
Haulier	1	Domestic Servants	27
Coker's woman (?)	1	Launderess/Washerwoman	4
	82	Charwoman	1
		Errand Girl	1
			33
		Total	130

Source: 1851 census, PRO (HO/107/2490)

³² Ibid.

³³ Michael Hiley, *Victorian Working Women: Portraits from Life*, (Gordon Fraser, 1979), p.98

³⁴ Greenhow, p. 160

³⁵ Ginswick, pp. 30-31

³⁶ Working women here means women with occupations recorded in the census.

The jobs undertaken by women were generally at the surface, following the prohibition on their employment underground, and were of an inferior status and lower paid than men's. Women were engaged in filling and hitching trams, tipping waste, and cleaning the shale off ironstone. The average weekly wage of a poll-girl cleaning iron ore at Dowlais was 3s 9d, and that of a tipper 4s³⁷. The *daily* average wage of a coal miner in 1841 was 3s 7½d. The social cachet of a poll-girl was so low that they sometimes had difficulty in finding a marriage partner. Once married, however, women on Llanelly Hill seldom took paid employment. Marriage took place fairly early on. In Brynmawr, Jennings attributed this to the surplus of males in the community, and the lack of suitable employment³⁸. In 1851, only 8 married women on Llanelly Hill had occupations, all but one of whom (a huxter) were based in the home.

Table 4.8 - Occupations of married women on Llanelly Hill, 1851

Occupation	Age	Husband's occupation
Dressmaker	21	Coal Miner
Dressmaker	29	Coal Miner
Dressmaker	37	Iron Miner
Dressmaker	40	Iron Miner
Housekeeper	43	Labourer
Housekeeper	47	Labourer
Laundress	38	Iron Miner
Huxter	63	Formerly labourer in iron works

Source: 1851 census, PRO (HO/107/2490)

There was little sweated or put-out labour undertaken by women in the home. There were only 13 dressmakers, for example (table 4.7). If we consider Eynsham, an agricultural parish in Oxfordshire with a similar size population to Llanelly Hill, we find that 139 married women were recorded as having occupations³⁹. However, the

³⁷ Ginswick, p.31.

³⁸ Jennings, p.34

³⁹ John Golby, (Ed.) *Studying Family and Community History, Vol.3: Communities and Families*, (Cambridge University Press, in association with the Open University, 1994), p.51. Eynsham's population in 1851 was 1,941; Llanelly Hill's 1,822.

pressure to take up sweated labour was often greater in an agricultural area, where men's wages were less than in industry, and their work seasonal. A high incidence of sweated labour (glovemaking in the case of Eynsham) was frequently found in communities with a surplus of women: a situation reversed in mining settlements.

That ubiquitous form of female employment, domestic service, also afforded little opportunity in a mining settlement, because of its low socio-economic status. Only 7.12% of Llanelly Hill households had domestic servants in 1851. There were 27 female domestic servants employed there, at least 5 of whom appear to have been 'kin servants', rather than true domestic servants: that is, they were related to the household in which they worked.

There was a profound change to the employment of women over the second half of the century. Between 1851 and 1891, the percentage of the female workforce employed in mining dropped from 68.33% to nil. As a result, the percentage of women in the workforce at large fell from 14.62% to 8.85%. Only 40 women were recorded as having occupations at the 1891 census. The working population of Llanelly Hill had dropped by 45% between 1851 and 1891, due partly to the fall in the general population of 36% between those years, but due also to the exclusion of women from the mining industry.

Table 4.9 - Female occupations, Llanelly Hill, 1891

Occupation	No.	Occupation	No.
Domestic Servants	26	Teachers	3
Dressmakers	10	Innkeeper	1
		Total	40

Source: 1891 census, FKO, (RG/12/4576)

The only new female occupation to be introduced was teaching, but this might be misleading since all three teachers were teenage girls, suggesting they were probably pupil-teachers or monitors, under the Board School system introduced in 1870.

Employment opportunities for women in the rest of the parish were slightly greater, particularly in trade and commerce. In 1891, there were 36 female

tradespersons in the parish, including 11 women publicans, 4 grocers, 4 general shopkeepers, and a Postmistress at Blackrock. But they were still a small minority compared with male tradesmen. There were no women engaged in trade or commerce on Llanelly Hill, except for a female publican, because the retail sector was severely restricted.

Trade and Commerce

The development of a retail sector in the parish was at first hampered by the truck system which operated at company shops. Early on, the company shops had a valid purpose: there was nothing else in the vicinity to provide the wherewithal of life for the new industrial settlements. There also were legitimate reasons for the truck system: the Clydach Ironworks paid wages in tokens redeemable at its company shops in order to overcome a shortage of coin during the Napoleonic wars⁴⁰. The shortage of coin and lack of a local banking system continued into the 1820s, when tram loads of coin were brought to Brynmawr from the Dowlais Bank every six to 8 weeks⁴¹. Despite the Truck Act of 1831 forbidding the payment of wages in anything other than coin of the realm, company shops at Sirhowy, Blaina, Ebbw Vale, and Clydach, were still operating the truck system around 1849-51, through the collusion of shopkeepers and employers⁴². Shopkeepers at Brynmawr found their trade hit by company shops at Clydach, Llanelly Hill and Nantyglo⁴³, and as late as the 1860s, workers in the town tried to form a co-operative in response to the continued presence of company shops⁴⁴. The Clydach Ironworks ran two company shops. The one at Darenfelen on Llanelly Hill⁴⁵ had ceased operation by 1871, when it was being used as housing.

Table 4.10 shows the numbers employed in various occupations recorded in trade directories of 1844 and 1858, divided between Brynmawr and the remainder of

⁴⁰ Minchinton, p. 19.

⁴¹ Edwin Poole, *The History and Biography of Brecknockshire*, (Brecon, 1884), p.236

⁴² Ginswick, pp.147 and p.152.

⁴³ Jennings, p.99

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ At a place known appropriately as Starvation Point.

Table 4. 10 – Trade occupations, Brynmawr and remainder of Llanelly parish, 1844 and 1858

Occupation	Llanelly		Brynmawr		Total	
	1844	1858	1844	1858	1844	1858
Attorneys	0	0	0	2	0	2
Auctioneers	0	0	0	1	0	1
Bakers	0	0	0	5	0	5
Bank managers	0	0	0	1	0	1
Bill posters	0	0	0	1	0	1
Blacksmiths	2	2	2	4	4	6
Booksellers	0	0	1	3	1	3
Boot and shoemakers	3	5	10	11	13	16
Brickmakers	0	0	0	1	0	1
Butchers	1	0	8	11	9	11
Cabinet makers	0	0	1	2	1	2
Chemists	0	0	2	2	2	2
China dealers	0	0	0	4	0	4
Clergy	1	4	0	7	1	11
Coal company manager	0	0	0	1	0	1
Coroner (deputy)	0	0	0	1	0	1
Curriers	0	1	1	3	1	4
Insurance agents	0	0	0	9	0	9
Furniture brokers	0	0	1	2	1	2
Grocers and dealers in sundries	7	9	22	28	29	37
Gas works proprietor	0	0	0	1	0	1
Hardware dealers	0	0	1	3	1	3
Hay & corn dealers	0	0	1	1	1	1
Hauliers/carriers	0	0	0	2	0	2
Iron founder/ironmonger	0	0	4	6	4	6
Ironmaster, Clydach ironworks	0	1	0	0	0	1
Joiners & carpenters	3	3	2	4	5	7
Drapers	0	0	0	5	0	5
Managing clerk, Clydach ironworks	0	1	0	0	0	1
Millers	0	2	0	0	0	2
Milliners & dressmakers	0	0	0	6	0	6
Mineral agents (coal and mine)	0	3	0	0	0	3
Nail makers	0	0	2	2	2	2
Painters, glazers & plumbers	1	1	3	2	4	3
Police (1 inspector, 1 sergeant)	0	0	0	2	0	2
Postmaster/mistress	0	2	1	1	1	3
Printers	0	0	1	2	1	2
Publicans & beer retailers	32	38	37	77	69	115
Roll turner	0	0	0	1	0	1
Saddlers	1	0	0	2	1	2
Schoolmaster/mistress	3	6	0	2	3	8
Stamp distributor	0	0	0	1	0	1
Stone masons	0	0	0	1	0	1
Surgeons	1	2	0	1	1	3
Tailors	4	6	3	9	7	15
Tallow chandlers	0	0	2	1	2	1
Timber merchants	0	1	0	1	0	2
Tinmen & braziers	0	0	2	2	2	2
Vetinary surgeon	0	1	0	0	0	1
Watchmakers	0	0	2	7	2	7
Wheelrights	1	1	1	1	2	2
Total	60	89	109	242	169	331

Source: Slater's trade directory, 1844; Kelly's trade directory, 1858

Llanelly parish. The importance to the parish of Brynmawr as a centre of trade and commerce is immediately apparent, with the remainder of the parish containing only a thin distribution of tradespersons.

The origins of the town of Brynmawr have already been touched upon. By 1847, the town, with a population of around 5,000, had 57 shop and innkeepers, rising to 65 by 1881⁴⁶. Its location at the heads of several valleys, and on the Abergavenny to Merthyr turnpike road, was the reason for the town's commercial growth. A succession of traders, including Scottish and Jewish credit drapers, used the town as a base to serve the populous mining valleys to the south, hence the town's numerous hotels and coaching inns, which only increased in number with the building of the Merthyr-Tredegar-Abergavenny railway in the 1860s. Many of the itinerant tradesmen settled in the town (so much so that the town's Bailey Street was nick-named Jew Street). The town's focus was initially a crossroads formed by Glamorgan Street and Worcester Street, which were probably tramways joining the Nantyglo ironworks with quarries and coal and ore gathering grounds to the north. From the 1820s, as the nucleus expanded, the focus shifted, until the most important street became Beaufort Street, containing the major coaching inns, leading down onto the Market Square. The market squares in many iron towns arose at the spot where produce was brought to the ironworks from the surrounding countryside. The Clydach works had a large yard (still known locally as the Saleyard) where a weighing machine stood. Here, surplus coal was weighed for sale, as was produce, such as hay and pit timber, brought in from the surrounding rural area. Here, too, the Abergavenny to Merthyr mail coach stopped to collect and deliver post for the works. It was a primitive form of market place, but in the case of Clydach, never went beyond that. In settlements that made the transition to township, this area became a fully-fledged market place, and usually acquired a market hall (as Brynmawr did in 1844).

⁴⁶ Hilda Jennings, *Brynmawr: A Study of a Distressed Area*, (Allenson, 1934), p.101

The occupations listed in table 4.10 above belonged overwhelmingly to men. Occupations held by women were limited in 1844 to 5 publicans, 4 beer retailers, 3 grocers, a schoolmistress and a furniture broker. In 1858, there were 8 women beer retailers, 5 milliners or dressmakers, 4 publicans, 3 schoolmistresses, 3 grocers, 2 postmistresses, a currier, an insurance agent, an ironmonger, and a painter, plumber or glazier. Of these 29 women traders in 1858, 19 were located in Brynmawr, and 10 in the rest of the parish, representing 7.8% and 11.2% of tradespeople in those areas, respectively.

The most important forms of retail trade in both years were: boot and shoemakers, grocers, tailors, and, overwhelmingly, publicans and beer retailers. In 1844, there were 11 public houses in the parish outside Brynmawr, and 16 more in the town itself, added to which there were a further 21 beer retailers in the parish and an equal number in the town, making 69 licensed outlets in total. By 1858, numbers had risen to 16 public houses in the parish outside Brynmawr, and 29 more in the town, plus a further 22 beer retailers in the parish and 48 in the town, totalling 115 licensed outlets. A complete listing of public houses in the 1844 and 1858 trade directories is given at Appendix IV, but it is important to remember that trade directory coverage was incomplete: there were an indeterminate number of public houses not listed.

The licensing trade was the only form of retail activity present in any strength on Llanelly Hill. Table 4.11 shows those public houses identifiable on Llanelly Hill from a variety of sources, together with the earliest date they are referred to, and the main occupation of the publican (necessary because the keeping of a public house was usually regarded as a secondary occupation). Where more than one primary occupation is recorded, this is due to changes in proprietorship over time.

There were, in addition to the public houses listed in Table 4.11, four beer retailers recorded at the 1851 census (including Mary Williams, a beer retailer and unmarried head of household) and two at the 1891 census.

Table 4.11 - Public houses on Llanelly Hill, 1851-1881

Year	Public house	Location	Primary occupation of publican
1851	Jolly Colliers	Waun Lapra	Labourer/Innkeeper/Coal miner
1851	Newfoundout	Coed Cae Newydd	Coal miner/Coal miner/ Farmer/Coal miner
1851	Racehorse	Gellyfelen	Labourer/Coal miner/ Coal miner/ Labourer
1851	Unidentified	Waun Lapra	Coal miner
1861	Grouse Inn	Gellyfelen	Coal miner
1861	Brittania Inn	Gellyfelen	Coal miner
1861	Greyhound	Cwm Nant Gam	Iron miner
1861	Glwyd	Darenfelen	Coal miner
1861	Heath Bush	Llamarch	Iron miner/Colliery Clerk
1861	Colliers' Arms	Gellyfelen	Coal miner/Iron miner/ Innkeeper
1871	Miners' Arms	Llamarch	Retired coal miner/Innkeeper/ Coal miner
1881	Prince of Wales	Blaenduar	Innkeeper/Innkeeper

Source: census returns 1851-91; Slater's Directory 1858, Kelly's Directory, 1891, 1901; Ordnance Survey 1880

Llanelly Hill supported very few shopkeepers or tradesmen, because of its small size, and the proximity of the nearby market towns of Abergavenny and Brynmawr:

The people [of Llanelly Hill] were thrifty... [they would] buy a cow or feed a pig or two. A common custom was to go to Abergavenny Cheese Fair on the 25th September, and buy a few whole cheeses, and many would salt down a tub of butter occasionally - in fact do all they could to provide themselves with the necessaries of life at the best advantage⁴⁷

and

Nor have they [people on Llanelly Hill] a Bookseller nor Newsagent in the neighbourhood, Brynmawr being the nearest town. Therefore anything that is required, if possible, is postponed until Saturday evening when you may have

⁴⁷ Jordan (n. pag.)

plenty of company going in the same direction, here you can see the genuine picture of the workman's Saturday night⁴⁸.

In 1851, Llanelly Hill had 6 cordwainers, 5 beer retailers, 4 grocers, 3 tailors, and 2 butchers⁴⁹. The relatively high number of boot or shoemakers and cordwainers was due to the demand for waterproof pitboots in a mining settlement⁵⁰. The number of shopkeepers and tradesmen per head of population rose from 1: 121 in 1851, to 1: 87 in 1891 (in the latter year, these comprised 5 grocers, 5 boot or shoe makers, 2 innkeepers, a tea dealer and a shop assistant), though because of the fall in population, this actually meant a drop in the number of tradespeople from 20 to 14. These tradespeople were mainly local, contrasting with Carter and Wheatley's observation that a vacuum in the retail trade at Merthyr Tydfil 'was filled by immigrant tradesmen, largely from England with the counties of the South-West predominant'⁵¹.

Agriculture on Llanelly Hill

On Llanelly Hill in 1851, only 3 of a total workforce of 831 were employed in agriculture, these being 2 agricultural labourers and 1 farm bailiff. There were two farms on Llanelly Hill: Penffyddlwn and Coed Cae Newydd, but these had been acquired by the Clydach Ironworks, and put to industrial use. The farm bailiff and 4 out of a total of 7 ostlers lived at Coed Cae Newydd in 1851, suggesting the farm there was used for stabling pit ponies and donkeys used for haulage.

Most collieries of any size at this time had a colliery farm attached⁵², and it is clear that this is what Penffyddlwn Farm was used as in 1878, when it had no livestock, except for a few horses, but '46 acres of very fertile meadowland producing large and

⁴⁸ Luther, p.6

⁴⁹ A shoemaker is discounted because he was enumerated in the census as a visitor.

⁵⁰ Browning, p.37

⁵¹ Carter & Wheatley, p.22

⁵² A.R. Griffin, *The British Coalmining Industry*, (Moorland, 1977), p.67

valuable hay crops, stabling for 30 horses, large shoeing and saddler's shops, storehouse and granaries⁵³.

Though of little importance as an employer, agriculture probably featured larger in people's lives than might be expected. There was the seasonal migration of agricultural workers to the mines and furnaces, and the rural background and penury of the industrial worker meant many had some form of smallholding. Industrial workers were sometimes co-opted to the company farm at harvest time, as at the Blaenavon Iron Company's Coity Farm, which was 'remarkably successful with the hay crop ... there were none like Cardiganshire men to mow heavy crops, so the Cardies were requisitioned each year⁵⁴. In June 1824, the Nantyglo ironmaster, Crawshay Bailey, increased the wages of his firemen and labourers to prevent the latter from taking up better paid employment harvesting⁵⁵.

The decline of the iron industry in the 1860s gave a slightly higher profile to agriculture as a form of employment. In 1881, four years after the final closure of the ironworks, there were 2 farmers and 6 agricultural workers on Llanelly Hill (one of whom was retired). There were 7 people employed in agriculture in 1891, from a total workforce of 451, including a farmer at Coed Cae Newydd, 4 farm labourers, a farmer whose secondary occupation was butcher, and a farm crofter⁵⁶. These figures were in truth negligible, representing 0.36% of the workforce in 1851, and 1.55% in 1891: even the steamcoal valleys of Ogmore and Garw, which were fast developing in 1881, had a higher percentage of their population employed in agriculture, at 3.8%⁵⁷.

Pauperism

The incidence of pauperism was low at the time of the 1851 and 1891 censuses, though it may have been higher at times of recession in the iron trade. There were only

⁵³ Particulars and conditions of mining and other properties to be sold by auction at Abergavenny on 28th March, 1878, Newport Reference Library, Local History Collection, 672 PX M 330

⁵⁴ Browning, p.13

⁵⁵ Letter, John Scale to John Powell, 29th June 1824, (Maybery, 3381)

⁵⁶ The retired farmer has been excluded.

⁵⁷ P. N. Jones, p.19

8 paupers or claimants of parish relief in 1851, and only 1 in 1891, with another dependent on relatives. The local union workhouse was situated in Llangattock parish, but the incidence of out-relief as opposed to indoor relief was fairly high, being a ratio of 5 to 1 for England and Wales, 7 to 1 for the Abergavenny Union, and 12 to 1 for the Crickhowell Union⁵⁸.

Systematic Arrangement of the Data on Occupations

The occupational data derived from the census in respect of Llanelly Hill is here arranged on a standard basis, to enable comparison with other communities, and to assess developments over lengths of time. The basis used is that devised by Charles Booth in his study of the London poor (1889-1902), as later modified by W. A. Armstrong, in his study of York in 1851⁵⁹. This scheme assigns the working population to nine major industrial categories or sectors. There are a further three categories for the residual or dependent population, these being people who did not work.

Some further adjustments have been made to Armstrong's modification of Booth, in order to accommodate the occupational structure of a mining community. Most importantly, hauliers have been assigned to mining rather than transport, and ostlers to mining rather than agriculture (where Booth included grooms, their closest equivalent).

The property owning or independent sector on Llanelly Hill consisted solely of an elderly widow annuitant; the indefinite sector comprised paupers and those whose occupations were illegible in the census; and the dependent sector included all those remaining, who were not given occupations in the census.

⁵⁸ 2nd Annual Report of Local Government Board, appendix 65. The figures relate to 1st January 1872.

⁵⁹ W. A. Armstrong, *A Social Study of York*, (Cambridge, 1974); also 'The use of Information about Occupation', in E.A. Wrigley (Ed.), *Nineteenth Century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data*, (Cambridge, 1972).

Table 4.12 shows the percentages of the working population, and total population, in each of these categories, for the years 1851 and 1891. The equivalent percentages for England and Wales are given alongside in parenthesis.

Not surprisingly, mining was by far the largest sector on Llanelly Hill, with over 80% of the working population employed in this area in 1851 and 1891. A comparison with the national figures shows the relative unimportance to Llanelly Hill of agriculture, domestic service, manufacture, and dealing, as areas of employment. Mingay makes the point in relation to agricultural communities that their employment structure could be quite varied⁶⁰. In 1851, Binbrook, in Lincolnshire, with a population of 1,300 (some 500 less than Llanelly Hill) had 109 craftsmen, including wheelwrights, blacksmiths, dressmakers, tailors, shoemakers, joiners and carpenters. There were, in addition, 31 tradesmen, including butchers and grocers. Ashwell, in Hertfordshire was described as a village wholly engaged in agricultural pursuits, yet a quarter of the adult males were employed in crafts and trades. Even in a community with light industry, there was still far more variety of occupation than on Llanelly Hill. The village of Redbourn in Hertfordshire had a population of 2,085 in 1851. A quarter of the town's population (527 people) were employed in connection with the straw plaiting trade, based on the hat manufacturing centre at nearby Luton. A further 300 were farmhands, but the building and leather trades were also well represented, together with a strong middle class element employing domestic servants, grooms, gardeners, and so forth. Reliance on a single heavy industry would have severe implications for Llanelly Hill when the iron industry collapsed. Although this was mitigated in part by the rise of the coal industry, the problem recurred in the 1930s, when Brynmawr, with 36% long term unemployed, was designated as a distressed area'.

Another feature to emerge from table 4.12 is that the percentage of dependants (54.3% in 1851) was close to Armstrong's figure for Sheffield of 57.3%, but higher

⁶⁰ G.E. Mingay, *Land and Society in England, 1750-1980*, (Longmans, 1994) pp 180-2

**Table 4.12 - Occupational Structure of Llanelly Hill, 1851 and 1891, by
percentage (percentages for England and Wales shown in brackets)**

Sector	Total population		Working population	
	1851	1891	1851	1891
Agriculture	0.2 (10.00)	0.7 (4.5)	0.4 (21.9)	1.8 (10.2)
Mining	38.0 (1.9)	31.5 (2.3)	84.7 (4.1)	81.5 (5.3)
Building	0.7 (2.6)	0.6 (2.9)	1.6 (5.7)	1.6 (6.6)
Manufacture	1.6 (15.4)	1.4 (14.3)	3.7 (33.9)	3.5 (32.7)
Transport	-- (1.9)	0.2 (2.8)	-- (4.2)	0.4 (6.5)
Dealing	0.8 (3.0)	0.8 (4.0)	1.7 (6.7)	2.0 (9.1)
Industrial Service	1.7 (2.1)	0.9 (3.1)	3.8 (4.6)	2.2 (7.2)
Public Service and Professional	0.1 (2.2)	0.4 (2.8)	0.2 (4.9)	1.1 (6.5)
Domestic Service	1.7 (6.2)	2.2 (6.9)	3.9 (13.8)	5.8 (15.7)
Property Owning or Independent	0.05 (1.2)	-- (1.7)		
Indefinite	0.7 (0.6)	0.3 (1.2)		
Dependants	54.3 (53.0)	61.0 (53.4)		
Total	100.00 (100.1)	100.00 (99.9)	100.0 (99.8)	99.9 (99.8)

Source: Census, 1851 PRO (HO/107/2490) and 1891 PRO (RG/12/4576)

than his figure for Bath of 42.3%. (Both Armstrong's figures relate to 1861). Armstrong chose Sheffield as a 'great industrial city', in contrast to Bath as a 'centre of conspicuous consumption'. Armstrong attributes the greater number of dependants in Sheffield to socio-economic reasons: domestic servants were less numerous in Sheffield than in Bath, so there was a correspondingly higher proportion of female dependants. The same considerations, albeit on a lesser scale, applied to Llanelly Hill.

Perhaps the most significant change in employment on Llanelly Hill between 1851 and 1891, was the increase in the dependent population (up from 54.3% to 61.0%). This was largely due to the exclusion of women from the mining industry⁶¹. There was precious little alternative employment for them, and the increase in dependants of some 7% was almost exactly matched by a drop of 7% in the total population employed in the mining sector.

⁶¹ The evidence of the census is that dependants were almost invariably women and children.

Chapter 5

Housing and Health

Housing in Llanelly parish

The Reverend Thomas Payne, writing in 1785, described farmhouses in the parish of Llanbedr and the surrounding area of Breconshire as 'generally arranged in a line - and the habitations of men and cattle under one common roof'¹. Llanbedr was a parish to the north of Llanelly. The dwelling described was the longhouse, in which family and livestock dwelt under one roof. In Payne's account, the cowhouse was divided by a wide passage from a spacious kitchen, which had a small pantry and bedchamber leading off it. Above the whole was a common bedchamber where the farmer and his wife slept on a raised bedstead with the farm servants arrayed on flock mattresses on the floor. Window lattices were made of split willow; glass was rarely used. We can assume with reasonable certainty that the same type of dwelling was to be found in Llanelly parish, along with less substantial accommodation belonging or rented to labourers and cottagers.

Prior to the arrival of the iron industry in the late eighteenth century, housing in the parish probably consisted of a number of farmsteads, and a small agricultural village centred on the common at Gilwern, with the large houses of local noteworthies - minor gentry and yeomen farmers - on the outskirts. The effect of the Clydach Ironworks on the population of the parish has already been observed. Table 5.1 shows the population of the parish between 1801 and 1831, the number of families and houses, the mean household size, and the number of houses being built. The mean household size is calculated by dividing the population by the number of houses. In fact, this tells us relatively little, because the population was not evenly dispersed through the available accommodation, and houses were not of a uniform size

¹ Quoted in D. Parry-Jones, *Llanelly Parish, Breconshire*, (South Wales Argus, 1963) article 16

(something noted by Anderson)². It is useful as a broad indicator, but takes no account of under and over occupation.

Table 5.1 - Housing provision in Llanelly parish, 1801-1831

		1801	1811	1821	1831*
Population	Aberbaiden	608	1097	1781	4041
	Maesygywartha	329	724	1181	
No. of families	Aberbaiden	58	212	324	780
	Maesygywartha	61	149	228	
No. of houses	Aberbaiden	58	212	324	778
	Maesygywartha	61	145	228	
Mean household size	Aberbaiden	10.48	5.17	5.50	5.19
	Maesygywartha	5.39	4.99	5.18	
Houses building	Aberbaiden	0	18	3	5
	Maesygywartha	0	13	2	

Source: Published census abstracts, 1801-1831, PP, 1812, XI, 1822, XV and XXI, 1831, XXXVI-XXXVIII

* Parish returned as single unit in 1831.

In 1801, the population in the industrialised part of the parish (Aberbaiden) was considerably greater than in the non-industrialised (Maesygywartha). Housebuilding was stagnant in both divisions, and the result was an average household of 10 people in Aberbaiden, compared with only 5 in Maesygywartha. Housebuilding had clearly not kept pace with population increase in Aberbaiden, and the result was overcrowding. A mean household size of 10.48 probably includes extra-familial members, such as lodgers, or perhaps multi-occupation of a dwelling house by more than one family.

The suggestion that insufficient new houses were being built at this time is reinforced by the remarks of Thomas Phillips, the manager at the Clydach Ironworks. In 1806, Phillips complained of a shortage of raw materials, and observed that more men could be employed if there were more houses for them³.

By 1811, the population had continued to rise, but a more active programme of housebuilding (31 houses were being built at the time of the census) resulted in a

² M. Anderson, 'Standard Tabulation Procedures', in E.A. Wrigley (Ed.), *Nineteenth Century Society, etc.*, (Cambridge, 1972), p.143

³ Letter, Thomas Phillips to Walter and John Powell, 23rd March 1806, (Maybery, 3244)

mean household size of 5 persons for each division. The mean figure would remain at this level for both divisions at each census to 1831. This was only slightly above the mean household size for Breconshire, which in 1811 had been 4.99. The building of new houses in the parish continued and, though its rate tailed off, it outstripped the rate of population growth in each decade except 1811-21:

Decade	% Growth in pop.	% Growth in houses
1801-11	94.3	203.36
1811-21	62.6	52.91
1821-31	36.4	41.3

Only in 1811 and 1831 does the census indicate houses in multiple occupation (in the sense there were more families than houses). In 1811, Maesygartha had 149 families living in 145 houses; in 1831, the parish as a whole had 780 families in 778 houses. The pressure on existing accommodation was perhaps not severe, in view of the number of houses standing empty (13 in 1811, 14 in 1821 and 27 in 1831). But the census does not indicate whether those empty houses were in a habitable condition.

Housing on Llanelly Hill

In 1851, Llanelly Hill had a population of 1,822 people occupying 379 houses. The mean household size was thus 4.81. This figure did not vary much between settlement areas, except for Cwm Nant Gam which had a mean household size of 5.3:

Settlement	Mean household size
Coed Cae Newydd	4.71
Waun Lapra	4.62
Mount Pleasant	4.86
Darenfelen	4.64

Gellyfelen	4.83
Cwm Nant Gam	5.30

Although the Clydach Ironworks must have provided some initial housing in these settlements, it had a policy of allowing workmen to build their own houses:

The dwellings provided by the company for the housing of their work people were comparatively few, most of the houses there were the property of the workmen themselves, and others and were of a better class, generally, than those belonging to the company. In this the workmen were encouraged to ... select any waste spot they liked to build upon⁴.

House building took place on summer evenings after the day's work. All male members of the family assisted, but outside help was sometimes forthcoming: 'Sometimes on an idle day at the works, a couple of friendly hauliers, for a small remuneration, would bring their horses and haul the stones together for them⁵. Help may also have been had from local craftsmen such as carpenters and masons.

This policy of allowing workmen to build their own houses was not unique. The same thing occurred at Brynmawr, which had begun to develop as a settlement from about 1820, when workers at the Nantyglo ironworks and, later on, speculative builders, started to build individual houses along tramroads connecting the works with iron ore gathering grounds to the north. Like Llanelly Hill, Brynmawr was some way away from the ironworks on which it depended, and distance may have been a factor in this policy of allowing workers to fend for themselves. In addition, the Clydach works probably lacked the capital for extensive house building. At a wider level, Dr A.R. Griffin states that few houses were built by coalowners in South Wales, but many

⁴ Thomas Jordan, *My Reminiscences of the Old Clydach Ironworks and Neighbourhood* (n pub, 1909), (unpaginated)

⁵ Ibid.

were built by private builders and building clubs⁶. By 1844, for example, colliers and ironworkers had themselves developed many sites at Garndiffraith, in modern day Gwent⁷.

Houses were also built by workmen pooling their resources in building clubs, which might involve the formation of a small building society. This practice gave rise to names such as Club Row, Abersychan, and presumably the Club Row at Clydach. Club Houses at Blaenavon were tenanted by club members, thus guaranteeing the club its rent. William Luther wrote that some houses on Llanelly Hill had been purchased by individual workmen with money they managed to save from wages⁸.

House building may have taken place in stages, where it was undertaken by the workmen themselves. William Luther wrote of early housing on the Hill that:

One storey in height was common in those days with one room in addition to the kitchen, with an out house for stores for food, and perhaps a coal house as well, all under the same roof. As the family increased in number, of course this out house was utilised as a new wing to the cottage, generally as a bedroom ... at last the original building would be well fortified with smaller ones all around⁹.

Early nineteenth century miners' housing in Durham also consisted of single storey dwellings, with a single room at ground floor, and an attic reached by a ladder. By mid-nineteenth century larger dwellings were being built, typically two-up two-down, arranged in long rows, and occasionally squares¹⁰ which was similar to the situation pertaining in South Wales.

⁶ A.R. Griffin, *The British Coalmining Industry, Retrospect and Prospect*, (Moorland, 1977), p.159

⁷ J. Lowe, *Welsh Industrial Workers' Housing*, (Cardiff, 1977), pp. 46-7

⁸ William Luther, *Llanelly Hill and its Antiquities*, (n. pub, 1887), p.4

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Griffin, pp.158-9

By 1891, Llanelly Hill's population had fallen to 1,158. This population occupied 245 houses, giving a mean household size of 4.73, which was slightly higher than a 'sending' community, like Bala, in North Wales, but lower than an area experiencing high in-migration, like the Ogmore and Garw valleys.

Mean household sizes

Bala (1881)	4.4
Llanelly Hill (1891)	4.7
Ogmore & Garw (1881)	5.8

It was mentioned above that the mean household size was not an accurate indicator of overcrowding. This can be illustrated to an extent by the 1891 census, which recorded tenements of less than 5 rooms. In all, Llanelly Hill had 203 tenements of under 5 rooms, this being 82.86% of its total housing stock. This high figure is probably due to the prevalence of the two-up, two-down type of dwelling.

Taking Mount Pleasant and Coed Cae Newydd as sample areas, the former had 12 tenements of less than 5 rooms, and the latter 7. These tenements were occupied by a total of 57 and 32 people, respectively. The mean household size, based on this data, would be 4.75 for the tenements in Mount Pleasant and 4.57 for those in Coed Cae Newydd. These averages are close to the norm, but in fact, they cover a range of situations, from a family of 3 occupying 2 rooms at Coed Cae Newydd, to a single person occupying 4 rooms at Mount Pleasant. The highest incidence of occupation was 2 persons per room, found at Coed Cae Newydd (8 persons occupying 4 rooms and 6 persons occupying 3 rooms). The lowest incidence was the above example of single occupancy of 4 rooms at Mount Pleasant. The 4 roomed tenements are likely to have been the standard two-up, two-down house which, given occupancy by 8 persons, would result in 4 persons sharing a bedroom (assuming 2 bedrooms, though exact sleeping arrangements would be influenced by the age and sex of the occupants. The

most practical arrangement was often for the wife and daughters to occupy one bedroom and the husband and sons the other).

Llanelly Hill also had the advantage of available space in which to build. Company housing was almost invariably built in rows, or sometimes squares. Examples of such rows can be seen on a conveyance plan of 1869 (Appendix I) and the 1880 Ordnance Survey at Llamarch, Darenfelen and Mount Pleasant (Appendix II). Extracts from these sources show clearly how Darenfelen was a settlement nucleated around two branches of the Llamarch tramroad, with a prominent row of housing at parcel 24 on the 1869 plan. The same plan shows the lower part of Llamarch, with a noticeable absence of any houses in rows, and Waun Lapra and Mount Pleasant, with a row of housing beneath Penfyddlwn farm (shown as parcel 51). These reproductions from the conveyance plan give a good sense of the space available on Llanelly Hill. Both William Luther and Thomas Jordan make clear that houses usually had gardens, and often a few acres of cultivated ground or fields attached to them, and this feature is evident from the plans. It is important to remember that Llanelly Hill lay in a rural setting, and that many of its inhabitants were from agricultural backgrounds. Animal husbandry on a small scale was common. The situation is best described by William Luther, who wrote 'This is the place to see the coal miner and farmer in the same person'¹¹. Remarkable too is the dominance of tramroads, and how they dictated the settlement pattern, which was reasonably ordered in the case of Darenfelen, where the rows probably represent company built housing, but decidedly haphazard at Llamarch, where workers had built their own housing.

The 1871 census is rare in recording the names of rows of housing. Thus, at Darenfelen, there was Old Row, New Row, Company Shop House, Sparbil Point, Saunders Row and Coed Cae Row; in addition there were Long Row and an

¹¹ Luther, p.4

unidentified building known as the Lodge, at Gellyfelen, Butchers Row and Sodom Row at Llamarch, and Llewellyns Row near Waun Lapra.

The frontier towns of the iron district were for long ungoverned by any form of civic authority, and suffered the familiar problems of lack of sanitation, sewerage disposal, drainage, and clean water. Cellar dwellings and back-to-back housing were amongst the worst types of housing found in the irontowns. It was written of the mining settlements to the west and south-west of Abergavenny, (an area which included Llanelly Hill) that 'there is much diversity in the character of the houses ... many of them are built back-to-back, or otherwise in such a manner as not to admit of through ventilation'¹². Another example of bad housing were the dwellings formed by bricking up railway arches, such as occurred locally at Blaenavon. Griffin concludes that the standard of much miners' housing in South Wales was higher than in the Scottish and Durham coalfields¹³ but, as his work is concerned with the coalmining industry *per se*, he may have had in mind the better condition of dwellings during the later development of the South Wales coalfield. There is no doubt that housing associated with the early, iron-related, development of the South Wales coalfield could be appalling. In 1849, an Inspector from the Board of Health wrote of Brynmawr that 'It is scarcely within the power of pen or pencil to convey ... an adequate idea of the condition of the cottage tenements which constitute the town'¹⁴.

Fig. 5.1 shows several types of housing formerly to be found on Llanelly Hill, though most of it has long since ceased to exist. The settlement in the foreground is Gellyfelen, that in the background, Darenfelen. The two are separated by the narrow gorge known as Cwm Llamarch. A row of three storey housing can be seen in the top right hand corner, whilst a row of two storey housing appears mid-photograph, right of centre. The long sloping rear roofs of this latter row are strongly reminiscent of the catslide outshot type of housing. This distinctive style is mentioned by Lowe, in *Welsh*

¹² Dr. Greenhow's second Report on Districts with Excessive Mortality from Lung Diseases, *4th Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council*, 1861, PP, 1862, Vol. XXII, Appendix IV

¹³ Griffin, p.159

¹⁴ Quoted in Hilda Jennings, *Brynmawr: a Study of a Distressed Area*, (Allenson, 1934), p.72

Fig. 5.1 Gellyfelen and Darenfelen, Llanelly Hill

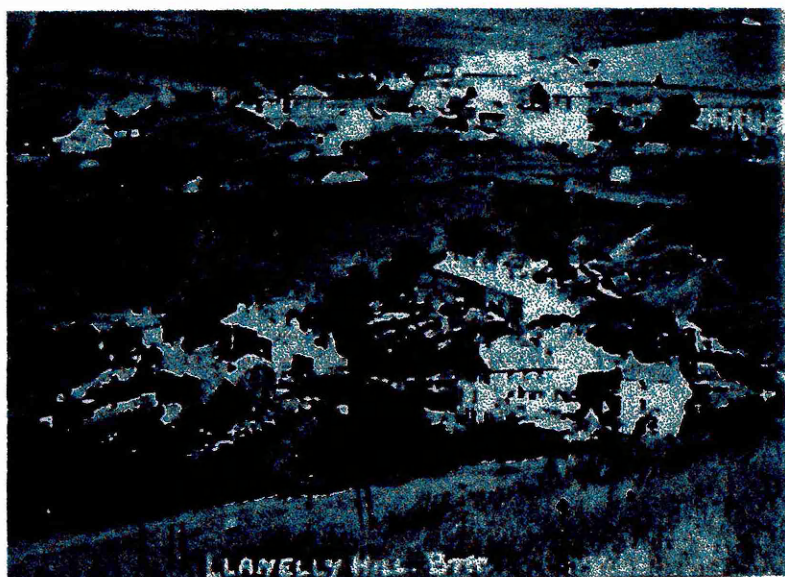


Fig. 5.2 Blackrock, Clydach Gorge



Industrial Workers' Housing, and they included in their design a long sloping rear roof encompassing both the main house and an outhouse. This form was particularly associated with the Crawshay family of ironmasters and the Merthyr Tydfil area, and dates to the period 1795-1830. But this form also occurred elsewhere, most notably at Nantyglo and, according to Lowe, there were between 2 and 5 catslide outshot houses at Blaenavon, and a similar number on both the north and south sides of the Clydach Gorge¹⁵.

Much three storey housing was adapted to suit the sloping hillsides of the South Wales valleys, with two storeys on the upslope face of the house, and three on the downside. A building of this type can be seen in fig. 5.1 just below the row of catslide outshot houses. This building has an entrance porch at ground level on the upslope side, but this level is in fact the middle storey of a three storey building. This type of housing no longer exists on Llanelly Hill, though there are examples in the village of Clydach and elsewhere in the Gorge. Fig 5.2 shows the village of Blackrock, situated on the north side of the Gorge between Clydach and Brynmawr. At the far right is a good example of housing with three storeys on the downslope and two on the upslope side. Fig 5.2 also shows the linear layout of settlements in the Gorge (the layout is similar to that of Clydach, though the latter settlement is larger) dictated by the physical geography, and the line of the Abergavenny to Merthyr turnpike road and, parallel to but lower than it, the Clydach railroad. Sometimes, as at Nantyglo and Clydach, such housing was split-level, and formed a 'dual' row, with the upper two storeys (or sometimes a single storey) forming a separate dwelling, and the lower storey forming in effect a cellar dwelling, which suffered from no through ventilation and was prone to excessive damp¹⁶.

Fig. 5.3 shows Llewellyn's Row, Llanelly Hill, taken at about the turn of the century. This row was approached through a gate to a common access lane, which divided the houses on one side, from their gardens on the other. This external layout

¹⁵ See D. Huw Owen (Ed.), *Settlement and Society in Wales*, (University of Wales Press, 1989), p.285.

¹⁶ Barrie Trinder, *The Making of the Industrial Landscape*, (Dent, 1982), p.111.



Fig. 5.3 Llewellyn's Row, Llanelly Hill



Fig. 5.4 Waun Lapra House, Waun Lapra, Llanelly Hill

could be found elsewhere in the irontowns, most notably in two examples at Merthyr: Rhyd-y-Car¹⁷, and Cyfarthfa Row, Georgetown (built in 1840).

Llewellyn's Row is an example of fairly good housing: double fronted, (Rhyd-y-Car was only single fronted) and with features such as fanlights and sash windows. These 4 roomed houses (two-up, two-downs) were common in south east Wales, and Lowe states they were generous in size (by contemporary standards) and well built. Houses with more than 4 rooms were intended for chargehands and foreman 'whose status and privileges were carefully preserved'¹⁸. Rees Jones, a mining contractor on Llanelly Hill, presumably had status in mind when, in 1834, he commented that he did not know how much his workmen earned, but none of them had sash windows in their houses¹⁹. In terms of furniture, South Wales miners were fond of ornate clocks and mahogany chests of drawers, which, as D.J.V. Jones pointed out, could be pawned in times of hardship²⁰. It is intriguing that Leifchild, in studying miners in Durham and Northumberland in 1856, contrasted the poor quality of their housing with their furniture, which included 8 day clocks, and mahogany chests of drawers and bedsteads²¹.

The photograph of Llewellyn's Row says much about the everyday life in a mining community. There are no men present in the photograph, all presumably being at work underground, and the line full of washing and the numbers of small children reveal much about the daily life of women in the community. The rural setting, and the way in which agricultural customs, such as small scale animal husbandry, were prevalent, is suggested by the chickens to be seen roaming about the entrance gate.

Something of the diversity of housing on Llanelly Hill can be seen by comparing Llewellyn's Row with the photograph of Waun Lapra House (fig. 5.4), also taken at around the turn of the century. This is a more substantial dwelling and

¹⁷ Now rebuilt at the St. Fagan's Folk Museum

¹⁸ Lowe, p.35

¹⁹ Merthyr Guardian, 29th March, 1834

²⁰ D.J.V.Jones, *Before Rebecca: Popular Protests in Wales 1793-1835* (Allen Lane, 1973), p.96

²¹ Quoted in Griffin, p.159

belonged to the grocer, Benjamin James, who was a deacon at Beersheba Baptist chapel. The grocery business was conducted from a cellar which opened out onto the street. If housing was a mark of status, then Waun Lapra House perhaps reflected James's standing as a local tradesmen and chapel elder.

The 1891 census enumerators' books record four 'Turff Houses', two at Llamarch and two at Fedw Ddu. These suggest encroachment by squatting. The *ty unnos* (the one night house) was a temporary shelter erected overnight on waste or common land. If smoke were issuing from the chimney by morning, then legal title was popularly assumed to vest in the squatter, plus an area of land extending in every direction for as far as an axe could be thrown. Legally this had no basis, though it was an ancient custom and may have had its provenance in mediaeval Welsh laws. These temporary shelters were often built of turves until a more permanent dwelling could be constructed. Workers at quarries and mines were amongst those who settled by squatting. Encroachment took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly on moorland, but there 'occurred a marked increase' at the beginning of the nineteenth century²². The process of encroachment continued into the early 1840s, but declined sharply around mid-century, with the passing of the Commons Enclosure Act. By 1823, the Clydach ironmasters freely acknowledged that encroachment had taken place on the Duke of Beaufort's land at Gellyfelen²³. Late examples of squatter settlements occurred in remote areas of Montgomeryshire in the 1880s²⁴, but it is unlikely that encroachment was taking place on Llanelly Hill as late as 1891, particularly since the population was decreasing at that time. The probable explanation for the use of the term turf houses is that squatters had built *tai unnos* on Llanelly Hill at an earlier stage, when in-migration was high, and that the name persisted, becoming associated with the permanent dwellings that in time replaced the

²² D. W. Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth Century Wales* (Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1977), p.29

²³ A list of farms in the occupation of Messrs. E. Frere and Co., Clydach, March 3rd, 1823, sent by John Scale to John Powell on 6th May 1823, (Maybery, 3325).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

temporary shelters. Because the Clydach iron company allowed their workers freedom to build their own dwellings, it is likely that many began this process by establishing *tai unnos* on the moorland.

Housing and Sanitation

In 1847, the parish curate said of Llanelly parish that 'their dwellings are almost universally destitute of those conveniences which are necessary to the health and comfort of mankind'²⁵. This is similar to the comments of the Commission on Employment of Children, Young Persons, and Women in Agriculture (1867) which reported that 'the majority of cottages that exist in rural parishes are deficient in almost every requisite that should constitute a home ... in a civilised community'²⁶. The standard of housing depended on a variety of factors, including the building materials to be found in the locality. Locally, ironstone and limestone were used for walls, and slate for roofing. These materials were more weatherproof than the thatch roofs, clay, cob and mud walls of some agricultural areas. The Clydach iron company sometimes used plates of rolled iron for roofs on its dwellings²⁷.

Housing on Llanelly Hill suffered the drawbacks common to nineteenth century working class housing, in particular lack of sanitation and clean water supply. Cholera broke out in the area in 1847-8 as part of the nationwide epidemic, but there were constant problems with more minor outbreaks of disease. In 1841 fevers were more prevalent among children at the Clydach Ironworks than injuries due to industrial accidents²⁸. In June 1872, Dr Gwynne Harries reported to the Local Government Board on the prevalence of enteric fever (typhoid) in Llanelly parish²⁹. The following year, there was a smallpox epidemic. Harries reported that, in the six year period to 1872, the annual death rate from enteric fever was 0.64 per 1,000 in the

²⁵ Revd. John Hughes, evidence to *Commission on Education in Wales*, PP, 1847, Vol .XXVII, p. 98

²⁶ Quoted in Richard Heath, *The Victorian Peasant*, ed. by Keith Dockray, (Sutton, 1989), p.29

²⁷ Lewis, *The Topographical Dictionary*, vol. 2, p.128

²⁸ Thomas Pierce, evidence to *Childrens' Employment Commission*, PP, 1842, Vol XVI

²⁹ Dr Gwynne Harries, *Report on the Prevalence of Enteric Fever in part of the Sub-district of Llanelly, Brecknockshire*, Medical Department, Local Government Board, September, 1872

town of Brynmawr. Following the cholera epidemic of 1847, the industrialist Henry Bailey had agitated for a Local Board of Health at Brynmawr, which was established in 1851. Significantly, in that part of the parish which fell outside the Local Board district, and which therefore had no public health provision³⁰, the death rate from typhoid was double that of the town, at 1.2 per 1,000. However, the Brynmawr Board of Health did the rest of the parish no favours in discharging its sewage at a farm on the mountain above the Clydach Gorge. Harries noted that the sewage pipes leaked their virtual entire length, thus polluting the spring water on the northern side of the Gorge, with an important spring at Blackrock being particularly noxious.

Harries also reported on Llanelly Hill, where deaths from typhoid were prevalent. He took as his example 28 houses at Darenfelen. These included 3 cottages converted from the old company shop. These 28 houses drew their water from a spout, reportedly fed by a spring under the gable end of the company shop house, and from a dip-well in the hillside to the rear. The 3 cottages at the old company shop shared the use of a single privy. At the 1871 census, these households consisted of 8, 3, and 2 persons, respectively, thus totalling 13 people with the use of a single toilet facility. The remaining 25 cottages had no toilets whatsoever, with predictable results:

the people living in the other twenty-five retire to the ground behind and above their houses to relieve themselves. When it comes on to rain the drainage of this ground flows into the well and then the water is said not to be so good ... A little further down the people used the water from a foul reservoir³¹.

The Clydach Ironworks did little to improve sanitation, which was consistent with its somewhat *laissez faire* attitude to the provision of housing in general.

There were many houses in the parish without privy accommodation. Such privies as did exist were not emptied regularly; ash-pits were rarely provided and,

³⁰ Harries' report was written shortly before the 1872 Public Health Act took effect

³¹ Harries, p.3

even when they were, Harries reported that people tended not to use them. Harries recommended a proper water supply, a system for the removal of excrement, and suggested the Brynmawr Board of Health be extended to the iron and coal district of the Clydach Gorge and Llanelly Hill. But, by June 1893, inspectors from the Sanitary Authority still had to report to the Crickhowell Board of Guardians that wells at Llamarch, Gellyfelen, and other places on Llanelly Hill, were unfit for human consumption because they were uncovered³². By now, this was not a failing of the ironworks (which had ceased operation) but of local government.

Public Health in Brynmawr and Llanelly Hill

The average death rate for England and Wales at the time of the 1848 Public Health Act was 23 per 1,000. The death rate for Wales alone was marginally lower at 22 per 1,000³³. Of the Welsh Registration Districts, the lowest mortality rate was found in Builth, Breconshire, at 16 per 1,000; the highest death rates were found in the mining and manufacturing districts around Abergavenny at 25 per 1,000, Crickhowell (which included Llanelly parish) at 27 per 1,000; and Merthyr Tydfil at 28 per 1,000. Crickhowell therefore had the highest mortality rate of any Registration District in Wales, except Merthyr. As Professor Jones indicates, Merthyr's death rate placed it on a par with Manchester, Liverpool and the East End of London³⁴.

Brynmawr had a Local Board of Health from 1851. Until 1882, however, qualifications for election to Boards of Health depended on a property qualification. As a result, they were often subject to the control of shopkeepers and small entrepreneurs. In 1886, a survey of some 250 urban sanitary districts in England and Wales found that the largest single class of board membership was shopkeepers, at 30.8%³⁵. The Brynmawr Board of Health was at first dominated by the Chairmanship

³² Abergavenny Chronicle, 9th June, 1893

³³ This figure, and the rates for the Registration Districts which follow, are mean figures for the period 1841-60, see I.G. Jones, *Mid-Victorian Wales: the Observers and the Observed*, (University of Wales Press, 1992), p.26.

³⁴ I.G. Jones, p.26

³⁵ I.G. Jones, pp.51-2, and see Transactions of the Sanitary Institute of Great Britain, VIII, 1886-7

of industrialists like Henry Bailey and then members of the Jayne family. The Duke of Beaufort's land agent was also prominent. From about 1860, with the election of George Hicks as chairman, power passed for the next thirty or forty years to small tradesmen in the town. (Hicks was proprietor of the Gwalia shoe factory in Brynmawr). D.R. Mills points out that this transfer of power from industrialists and landed interests to the mercantile class was a familiar pattern in larger industrial towns³⁶. Control by a middle-class element of shopkeepers and manufacturers was not necessarily a bad thing, but it could be counter-productive where, as ratepayers, they opposed any rate increases needed to finance public health improvements. Professor Jones has noted such obstructive tendencies in Local Boards of Health at Bridgend, and Llanelli, Carmarthenshire³⁷. In the case of Brynmawr, the Local Board was prepared to effect improvements, but met with some resistance from the town's ratepayers. The working class was not represented in civic government at Brynmawr, until the Board was replaced by the Urban District Council in 1894, when the first miner was elected. This was the beginning of a process which would result in the town's local government becoming Labour dominated³⁸.

By 1891, Brynmawr had gained a fairly full panoply of civic administration. Its Local Board consisted of 12 members, at least 7 of whom were shopkeepers, tradesmen or farmers³⁹. The Board had carried out notable improvements. The town was supplied with water from a reservoir on Llangattock mountain, and had a municipal cemetery, opened two years after the Board's formation. Brynmawr also had gas lighting, a market hall, a county police station, a reading room, and a stamp office.

Llanelly Hill was largely untouched by any legislative improvements until the Public Health Acts of 1872 and 1875 established sanitary authorities. The Hill fell within the Llanelly District of the Crickhowell Rural Sanitary Authority, with a

³⁶ D.R. Mills, *Lord and Peasant in Nineteenth Century Britain*, (Croom Helm, 1980), p.216

³⁷ I.G. Jones, p.52

³⁸ Jennings, p.74

³⁹ These were: a boot & shoe manufacturer, a greengrocer, two grocers, a farmer, a plumber & gasfitter, and a chemist & druggist.

Medical Officer of Health and Certifying Factory Surgeon based at Brynmawr. The 1875 Act compelled local authorities to pave, light and cleanse streets (there had been a discretion for them to do so since the Municipal Corporation Act of 1835). Yet, by 1887, Llanelly Hill had only 'a very vague accommodation as regarding roads of any kind. We have a supply of dangerous footpaths'.⁴⁰ Many cottages on Llanelly Hill were reached only by what William Luther described as 'little sheep walks'. There was the problem of Brynmawr's sewerage polluting the remainder of the parish's water supply, and in 1893-4, the state of roads, or rather lack of them, on Llanelly Hill was a major grievance. The road linking Darenfelen, Cwm Nant Gam, and Brynmawr, was impassable in bad weather, meaning children could not get to school, nor people to chapel. There were also periodic inquests at public houses on Llanelly Hill into fatal accidents met with on this road, involving falls into the Gorge below. Eventually, a deputation from Llanelly Hill was obliged to make formal representations to the Crickhowell Highways Board, pointing out that, whilst they paid their highway rates, they received little in return⁴¹.

As a relatively small and remote settlement, Llanelly Hill never made the transition to township as did Brynmawr, Blaenavon and other irontowns. As a result, the Hill was neglected and for long suffered a lack of any improvement. The failure of hilltop settlements to become recognisable towns, and to acquire a proper civic function, is evident from the smallpox epidemic of 1873. When the Local Government Board wished to communicate with local authorities in the areas affected, only settlements which had made the transition to township (Brynmawr and Blaenavon) had Boards of Health⁴². In the cases of Llanelly, Llangynidr and Llangattock, it still had to contact the parish vestry.

⁴⁰ William Luther, p.2. It did, however, have 'one very good road from Clydach valley to Waenavon station'.

⁴¹ Abergavenny Chronicle, 20th April, 1894

⁴² 2nd Annual Report of Local Government Board, 1872, PP, 1873, XXIX, Appendix 41

P.N. Jones writes that colliery settlements in the South Wales coalfield underwent three stages of development⁴³. Between 1850 and 1878 there was an intimate relationship between mine and settlement, typified by isolated terraced housing. This was the stage beyond which Llanelly Hill never progressed. Secondly, between 1878-98, an expansion took place, partly controlled by local authority bye-laws under the Housing Acts. Finally, from 1898 to 1926, another period of expansion occurred, in the form of large, regularly laid out additions to existing settlements. Brynmawr passed through each of these formative stages, and the town's continued development is shown by Hilda Jennings' map from her 1930s study of the town (figure 5.5). This shows that the area was originally uninhabited except for the Bryn Farm (in the top left hand corner). Between 1801 and 1821, a nucleus of a settlement arose around Glamorgan and Worcester Streets⁴⁴. This was intimately linked with the coal and iron ore gathering grounds to the north, and the street pattern reflects the route of mineral tramways. This nucleus expanded between 1821 and 1841, although growth then slowed to 1881. During the second phase identified by Jones, smaller plots were developed as the town expanded eastward, probably partly under local authority control. This expansion eastward probably helped confirm Beaufort Street and the Market Square as the commercial centre of the town. It was in this period of expansion that the Market Hall was rebuilt in 1894. Finally, the large, regularly laid out developments of the third phase can be seen in the area developed in the 1920s to the south west of the town.

Mortality Rates

One advantage that houses in coal mining districts enjoyed was warmth, because colliers were entitled to free or concessionary rate coal. Fuel in rural or agricultural

⁴³ P.N. Jones, *Colliery Settlement in the South Wales Coalfield, 1850-1926*, quoted in D. Huw Owen, pp.288-9

⁴⁴ Many Brynmawr street names were derived from the Dukes of Beaufort: the Somerset family, who were also Marquises of Worcester (hence Beaufort, Somerset and Worcester Streets. An exception to this is Bailey Street, named after the ironmasters of the Nantyglo works).

districts could be expensive because of transport costs. It was ironic, then, that at least one commentator should cite free coal as a cause of ill-health. Dr Greenhow, in his 1861 report on infant mortality in certain districts, noted of the mining areas at Merthyr Tydfil and around Abergavenny, that mothers took their children from overheated houses with large fires into the cold damp climate of South Wales⁴⁵. Bronchitis was said to be a common ailment of children in these areas.

Greenhow concluded that there was no correlation between the general mortality rate of a district and its infant mortality rate. Indeed, the infant mortality rate (classified as deaths of children under 1 year of age) was low in the Abergavenny area when compared with districts in the English Midlands.

Table 5.2 - Annual average mortality rates per 1,000 persons, various areas compared, 1851-60

District	Mortality rate	Infant mortality rate
Merthyr Tydfil	28.62	184.4
Nottingham	26.66	222.6
Birmingham	26.51	183.6
Coventry	25.27	215.5
Abergavenny	25.18	161.2

Source: Greenhow, 4th Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, 1861, PP, 1862, XXII, Appendix IV, Report on the Excessive Mortality of Young Children among certain Manufacturing Populations, p.189

Greenhow's explanation for the high infant death rates of Nottingham, Birmingham and Coventry (he also considered Blackburn and Wolverhampton) was that many married women in those districts went out to work. Women returned to factories and warehouses within weeks of confinement, leaving their children in the unsatisfactory care of elderly women or older children. Greenhow felt that these mothers were indifferent to their offspring, who as a result suffered from poor diets and a lack of maternal care. There was even a suggestion of infanticide⁴⁶. Married women on Llanelly Hill rarely worked outside the home, which may have played a part in lower

⁴⁵ 4th Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, 1861, PP, 1862, XXII, Appendix IV, Report on the Excessive Mortality of Young Children among certain Manufacturing Populations, p.187

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.190

infant mortality rates. Greenhow found the difference in attitude between mothers in the English Midlands and the Merthyr and Abergavenny areas 'most remarkable'. Mothers in the South Wales districts were 'devotedly attached' to their children; if anything, he thought they were perhaps over solicitous⁴⁷.

The general mortality rate for all the districts in table 5.2 was above the 'standard' rate of 23 per 1,000, which had been given a kind of statutory authority by the 1848 Public Health Act. A high mortality rate in mining areas was to be expected because of the dangers of work and the unhealthy living conditions. Greenhow recorded that the mortality rate attributable to lung diseases in Merthyr Tydfil and Abergavenny was 'considerably in excess of the standard rate of mortality from the same diseases'⁴⁸. The standard rate referred to was the annual average mortality rate per 1,000 people over the period 1847-55 for nine 'standard' registration districts. The standard rate of death from pulmonary diseases thus arrived at, ranged between 2.97 to 4.46 per 1,000 for males, and 3.04 to 4.54 for females. The comparable figures for Merthyr and Abergavenny for the period 1848-54 were⁴⁹:

	Merthyr Tydfil	Abergavenny
Male	6.61	6.62
Female	6.54	6.01

Lung disease was prevalent amongst iron and coal miners due to poorly ventilated mines. Greenhow mentions gunpowder smoke, but coal dust, low oxygen levels, and a number of naturally present gases were also harmful. There was a tendency for shallower mines to be the worst ventilated because they had lower concentrations of the explosive gas firedamp. The levels on Llanelly Hill were comparatively shallow at between 360 and 420 feet below the surface, and in the 1840s were ventilated by the

⁴⁷ Greenhow disapproved, probably rightly, of the practice of babies being entirely covered by their cot blankets, face and all.

⁴⁸ Greenhow, p.161

⁴⁹ These figures are taken from Greenhow, p.160

unsatisfactory method of interconnected workings. The lesser risk of firedamp meant iron mines were particularly poorly ventilated, and the clay bands containing iron nodules meant they were also damper. As a consequence, colliers suffered bronchitis and asthma, but tuberculosis was more common amongst iron miners. Because of the weightier nature of ironstone, iron mining was also the more exhausting.

The Health of the Mining Workforce

The Children's Employment Commission (1842) noted tendencies for miners to suffer increasing ill-health from their forties and fifties onwards, and for many to die before sixty. The reasons for this were the heavy labour involved in their work, the risks involved, the unhealthy conditions underground, and a gradual exhaustion that came about with age. Complaints ranged from heart disease, rheumatism, and lung disorders, to a variety of injuries, disablements or fatalities caused by accidents. These were, of course, general findings, and as one observer put it: 'The colliers and miners in this district [adjacent to Merthyr Tydfil] usually preserve their vigour till near 55, and a large percentage may be found capable of doing a good day's work at 60'⁵⁰. It is worth remembering, too, Payne's remark in relation to local agriculture, that 'a day labourer at fifty begins to be an old man.'⁵¹

Table 5.3 shows the ages of iron and coal miners in 1851 divided into fifteen year age groups (percentages of the total workforce are shown in brackets). The figures reflect the Commission's findings, showing a sudden drop in numbers amongst miners in their forties, and the continual dwindling in numbers thereafter. The bulk of the workforce were men in their twenties and thirties: 53.56% of iron miners and 55.61% of coal miners were aged between 20 and 39. Only 15.87% of iron miners and 21.08% of coal miners were aged between 40 and 59. For both iron and coal miners

⁵⁰ J Ginswick, (Ed.), *Labour and the Poor in England and Wales: Correspondents to the Morning Chronicle*, III, South Wales - North Wales, (Frank Cass, 1983), p.113

⁵¹ Revd. Henry Thomas Payne, material collected towards a history of Breconshire, (NLW, Minor Deposits, 187A) p.56

the number of those aged between 40-44 was half the number of those aged between 35-39.

Table 5.3 - The age structure of the mining workforce on Llanelly Hill, 1851

Age group	Iron miners	Coal miners
	No. (%)	No. (%)
0-4	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
5-9	1 (0.40)	3 (1.32)
10-14	31 (12.30)	13 (5.73)
15-19	35 (13.88)	28 (12.33)
20-24	37 (14.68)	36 (15.86)
25-29	36 (14.28)	35 (15.42)
30-34	28 (11.11)	23 (10.13)
35-39	34 (13.49)	32 (14.20)
40-44	17 (6.75)	16 (7.02)
45-49	8 (3.17)	16 (7.02)
50-54	10 (3.97)	10 (4.40)
55-59	5 (1.98)	6 (2.64)
60-64	5 (1.98)	6 (2.64)
65-69	3 (1.20)	3 (1.32)
70-74	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
75-79	2 (0.79)	0 (0.00)
Total	252 (99.98)	227 (100.03)

Source: 1851 census, PRO (HO/107/2490)

The average ages of iron and coal miners again emphasise those in their twenties:

Average	Iron Miner	Coal Miner
Mean	29	31
Median	27	29
Mode	26	20

The age range, to one standard deviation from the mean, was 15 to 43 for iron miners, and 18 to 44 for coal miners. This means that, statistically, about two thirds of the group should have fallen within these age ranges.

By 1891, there were high concentrations of coal miners in their late teens and twenties, a steady diminution of numbers in their thirties and forties, and low

percentages in the sixties (table 5.4). No-one was employed in the two youngest age groups because the minimum age for work underground had been raised to 12.

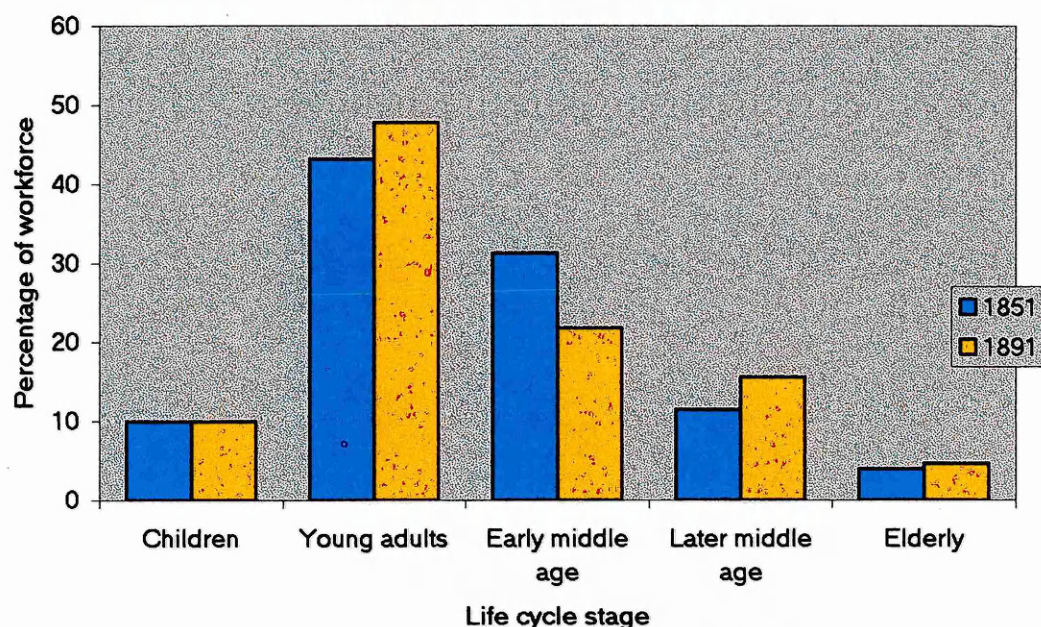
Table 5.4 - the age structure of the mining workforce on Llanelly Hill, 1891

Age group	Coal miners
0-4	0 (0)
5-9	0 (0)
10-14	32 (10.00)
15-19	63 (19.69)
20-24	46 (14.37)
25-29	44 (13.75)
30-34	26 (8.12)
35-39	26 (8.12)
40-44	18 (5.62)
45-49	17 (5.31)
50-54	20 (6.25)
55-59	13 (4.06)
60-64	6 (1.87)
65-69	6 (1.87)
70-74	2 (0.62)
75-79	1 (0.31)
Total	320 (99.96)

Source: 1891 census, PRO (RG/12/4576)

Figure 5.6 compares the ages of the mining workforce in 1851 and 1891. It shows a proportionately greater number of later middle aged and elderly miners in 1891, which may reflect a better survival rate. The proportion of young adult miners in the workforce had risen in 1891, which runs contrary to the supposition that in-migration had fallen off. However, this was likely to have been due to the use of steam power for haulage, rather than animals as in 1851, and the resulting drop in the numbers of hauliers. As hauliers were usually teenage boys, it seems reasonable to suppose that these were now employed as coal miners, thus swelling the young adult age group.

Fig 5.6 - Age structure of the mining workforce compared, Llanelly Hill 1851 and 1891



The mean and the median ages in 1891 were not dissimilar to those for iron and coal miners in 1851:

Mean	31
Median	27
Mode	19

The age range in 1891, to one standard deviation from the mean, was 16 to 46, placing more emphasis on youth than in 1851, which again seems attributable to the inclusion of young coal miners who would previously have been hauliers.

Chapter 6

Religion

The Roots of Dissent

Professor E. G. Bowen wrote that 'The Welsh puritanism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is English in origin and like the Anglo-Norman penetration that preceded it, spread over most of the lowlands of the east and south'¹. Bowen also noted the close similarity in distribution patterns of early Norman castles and Puritan congregations, particularly the concentration of Puritan churches around the Usk valley in 1715². The mountainous geography of Wales meant that any movement from the English border counties, whether in religious ideas or by way of military incursion, would inevitably be through the river valleys or coastal planes.

The Usk valley was particularly important in the establishment of Baptist and Independent causes, especially in the market towns of Brecon and Abergavenny. There were Baptists churches at Olchon on the Breconshire-Herefordshire border by 1633, and the chapel at Llanwenarth in the Usk valley was built in 1695. Llanwenarth was reputedly the first chapel to be built by Welsh Baptists, and is located at Govilon, a mile or so outside Llanelly parish. It is because of this chapel that the Abergavenny area has been called 'a place of vast importance in early Baptist history'³.

Abergavenny was also important in the early history of the Independents. Several leading Independents from the Abergavenny area (including William Wroth, who clashed with Archbishop Laud in the 1630s) founded a church at Llanfaches, Monmouthshire, in 1639. Here, the Independents became 'deeply rooted on the eastern borderland to Brecon in the Usk Valley'⁴. The Independents founded a denominational college at Brecon, and an early Independent church at Llangattock parish which later

¹ E.G. Bowen, *Wales: a Study in Geography and History*, (Cardiff, 1960), p.86

² Ibid.

³ P. Davies, p.13.

⁴ Ibid.

gave rise to a daughter church in the adjacent parish of Llanelly. By 1715, four of the six Dissenting places of worship in Breconshire belonged to the Independents. These four churches had an average attendance of 1,770 and included a church at Llangynidr, also near Llanelly parish⁵.

By the close of the seventeenth century, dissenting sects were well established in the border towns, including Brecon⁶. However, Breconshire returned a dissenting population of just 5.12% at the 1676 Compton Census (compared with a figure of 12% for South Wales in 1700⁷) suggesting that Dissent may have been confined to the towns and a distribution of churches around the Usk Valley. Presumably Dissent would have been English-speaking at this time, as it originated in the English border areas, and this would have been another factor prohibiting it from spreading to the monolingual Welsh uplands. It needs to be remembered too that the reliability of the Compton census has been questioned, so the Llanelly figure may not be wholly accurate⁸.

In 1851, the population of the Crickhowell Registration District was 21,697, with 65 places of worship.

Table 6.1 - Places of worship, Crickhowell Registration District, 1851

Denomination	No. of places of worship
Independents	16
Wesleyan Methodists	13
Baptists	12
Church of England	11
Calvinistic Methodists	7
Primitive Methodists	5
Undefined	1
Total	65

Source: I.G. Jones & David Williams: *Religious Census 1851: Calendar of Returns for Wales*, Vol.1, South Wales, p.125

⁵ Poole, p.331.

⁶ Bowen, p.79

⁷ Theophilus Jones, *History of the County of Brecknock*, vol.I, Appendix I.

⁸ For a discussion of the limitations of the census, see: A. Crockett and K.D.M. Snell, 'From the 1676 Compton Census to the 1851 Census of Religious Worship: Religious Continuity or Discontinuity?', *Rural History*, (1997), 8,1, p.56.

The Growth of Nonconformism in the Nineteenth Century

From an early stage, the religion of industrial South Wales was strongly Nonconformist in character. As early as 1803, non-Anglicans outnumbered Anglicans by 8 to 1 in Merthyr Tydfil. By 1816, there are estimated to have been 343 Methodist, 267 Independent and 176 Baptist causes in Wales⁹. Professor I.G. Jones wrote of Monmouthshire that:

In the industrial parts of the county it is the old dissenting nonconformist denominations that provided most places of worship and attracted most worshippers. These very numerous chapels all traced their descent from the gathered congregations of the hills whose history went back to the seventeenth century.¹⁰

Most major chapels in Llanelly parish traced their roots back to the seventeenth century Baptist foundation at Llanwenarth or the Independent foundation at Llangattock. Ministers from these chapels preached in Llanelly parish at private houses or in the open air: the Independents as early as 1768, and the Baptists by 1791. By 1801, a Baptist Sunday School had been established in the Trap Inn, later moving to the long room of the Old Beaufort Arms¹¹. These early foundations led to the building of Siloam Independent chapel in 1829, and Bethlehem and Beersheba Baptist chapels in 1830 and 1836¹². Their history bears out Professor Glanmor Williams's point, that Nonconformists needed no parish building, or endowment, or even minister to establish themselves, but typically held meetings in private houses, the long rooms of taverns or the open air¹³.

⁹ P.J. Morgan and D. Thomas, *Wales: the Shaping of a Nation*, (David & Charles, 1984) p.159

¹⁰ I.G. Jones, *The Valleys in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, (Lecture to the Standing Conference on the History of the South Wales Valleys, 1981), p.23

¹¹ I am indebted to Mr David Sillman, Secretary of Bethlehem, for this and other information on the chapel.

¹² Revd. William Jones, *The Church at Beersheba, Darenfelen*, (n. pub. 1906)

¹³ Glanmor Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality in Wales*, (Cardiff, 1979), p.104

Chapel building in the parish began in earnest in the late 1820s. By 1851, there were twenty four places of worship in the parish (including nine in Brynmawr), representing seven different denominations. Only three of these places of worship were provided by the Established Church (Table 6.2)¹⁴.

Table 6.2 does not include two schoolrooms at Gilwern and Darenfelen belonging to Siloam chapel. It is noticeable that all the chapels listed in Table 6.2 were situated in the industrial communities, with the single exception of the unnamed Wesleyan Methodist chapel, erected in Gilwern in 1848.

The relative strengths of religious denominations may be determined by the accommodation and attendance rates¹⁵. The accommodation rate indicates what percentage of the population could be seated by any one denomination. The attendance rate expresses the total attendances of one denomination as a percentage of the population. A further index is the percentage share, which expresses the total attendances of one denomination as a percentage share of the total attendance of all denominations.

These indices rely on data obtained from the religious census of 1851, which recorded attendances rather than identifying individuals. They do not therefore take into account individuals who may have attended more than one service. Perhaps the biggest drawback with the religious census is the tendency of some ministers to inflate attendances. Locally, attendances for Bethlehem, Rehoboth, and a rented room used by Beersheba, appear to have been exaggerated: Rehoboth, for example, returned an attendance of 1,500, based on a calculation of one foot to each individual, but was more likely to have held around 1,000¹⁶.

¹⁴ Statistics for the 1851 religious census are taken from I.G. Jones and D. Williams, *The Religious Census of 1851: a Calendar of Returns relating to Wales*, vol.I, South Wales (Cardiff, 1976), pp. 613-618. Table 6.2 does not include two schoolrooms at Gilwern and Darenfelen belonging to Siloam chapel.

¹⁵ See for example: I.G. Jones, *Explorations and Explanations, Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales*, (Gomer Press, 1981) particularly the essay 'Denominationalism in Caernarfonshire'

¹⁶ Judging by alterations made to the returns by the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages for Llanelly: Jones and Williams, pp. 617-8

Table 6.2 - Places of worship in Llanelly parish, 1851

Date	Name	Denomination	Location
--	Parish Church	Church of England	Llanelly
1821	Horeb	Welsh Wesleyan Methodist	Unknown
1828	Ebenezer	Welsh Calvinistic Methodist	Clydach
1829	Siloam	Independent	Clydach
1829	Rehoboth	Independent	Brynmawr
1829	Unnamed	Wesleyan Methodist	Clydach
1830	Bethlehem	Particular Baptist	Maesygwartha
1835	Tabor	Baptist	Brynmawr
1836	Calvary	English Particular Baptist	Brynmawr
1836	Beersheba	Particular Baptist	Darenfelen
Unknown	Rented apartment, Branch of Beersheba	Particular Baptist	Unknown
1838	Unnamed	Primitive Methodist	Unknown
1841	Unnamed	Primitive Methodist	Brynmawr
1841	Libanus	Welsh Calvinistic Methodist	Brynmawr
1842	Lecture Room	Church of England	Llanelly forge
1842	Carmel	Calvinistic Methodist	Darenfelen
1845	Bethania	Independents	Unknown
1846	Sion	Baptist	Brynmawr
1848	Unnamed	Wesleyan Methodist	Gilwern
1850	Unnamed	English Wesleyan Methodist	Brynmawr
1850	Green Street	Independent	Brynmawr
1850	Brynmawr Town	Church of England	Brynmawr
1850	Hired room	Independent	Unknown
Unknown	Unnamed	Welsh Wesleyan Methodist	Town Hall, Llanelly

Source: I.G. Jones & D. Williams, Religious Census of 1851, Calendar of Returns relating to Wales, Vol.1, South Wales, pp. 613-618

Table 6.3 shows, for each denomination in Llanelly parish the total seating capacity, the accommodation index (Ac/I), the total attendances at all services on Census Sunday, the attendance index (A/R) and the percentage share (P/S)¹⁷. Denominations are ranked in order of attendances.

The eighteenth century sects of Old Dissent - the Independents and Baptists - were much the strongest denominations in the parish in terms of both attendance and accommodation. The accommodation rate is not necessarily a good indicator of the popularity of a religious denomination, however. For example, the large English Wesleyan Methodist chapel at Clydach seated 800, but at its best attended service on Census Sunday was less than a quarter full, with only 130 in the general congregation, plus 30 Sunday School scholars.

Table 6.3 - Relative strengths of Religious Denominations, Llanelly Parish, 1851

Denomination	Seating	Ac/I	Total Att.	A/R	P/S
Baptists	2,043	21.18	3,574	37.06	35.26
Independents	2,462	25.53	2,529	26.22	24.95
Wesleyan Methodists	1,685	17.47	1,565	16.23	15.44
Calvinistic Methodists	790	8.19	1,244	12.90	12.27
Church of England	750	7.78	622	6.45	6.14
Primitive Methodists	632	6.55	601	6.23	5.93
Parish Total	8,362	86.71	10,135	105.09	99.99

Source: I.G. Jones & D. Williams, Religious Census of 1851, Calendar of Returns relating to Wales, Vol.1, South Wales, pp. 613-8

The Wesleyan Methodists also had a strong presence, though Wesleyanism was associated with English Methodism, rather than the Welsh Calvinistic brand. This was probably due to in-migration from the English border counties. In Herefordshire, Gloucestershire, and Somerset, for example, Methodism was the most important denomination after Anglicanism. In 1851, 9% of the population of Llanelly Hill had originated in those three counties, which may have had a bearing on the building of Zion Wesleyan Methodist chapel there in 1861.

¹⁷ Some chapels returned standing room. This has been discounted in calculating accommodation rates to put all chapels on an equal footing.

The provision of new chapels fell dramatically in the second half of the century. Only five were built in the parish outside Brynmawr, two, and perhaps three of which were in the agricultural village of Gilwern, rather than the industrial settlements, as previously.

Table 6.4 - Places of Worship in Llanelly Parish, post 1851

Date	Name	Denomination	Location
1851	Nazareth	Baptist	Penrhiw
1860	Mount Sion	Wesleyan	Darenfelen
1876	Hope	Baptist	Gilwern
1886	Gilwern	Independent	Gilwern
1896	Bethel	Independent	Unknown

Source: Royal Commission on the Church of England and Wales, PP, 1911, Vol.VI, Nonconformist County Statistics, Breconshire. p.20.

Few new chapels were built in this period because the population was waning (the case was otherwise with Brynmawr) though many chapels were rebuilt or extended during a religious revival that took place in Wales between 1903 and 1905. This revival began on the Glamorganshire-Carmarthenshire border and spread across South Wales. Membership of the leading four denominations in Wales increased from 463,000 to 549,000 in this period. Four of the eleven chapels listed for Llanelly parish by the 1905 Royal Commission had been rebuilt or enlarged in the years 1902-3.

The Response of the Established Church

Despite the prominence of Nonconformity in Wales, at the 1851 religious census, the Established Church still had the highest percentage of seats at places of religious worship (30%); followed by the Independents (24%), Calvinistic Methodists (18%) and Baptists (17%). The Established Church was usually at its strongest in rural anglicised districts, particularly those along the border. Conversely, it was weaker in industrialised urban districts. Llanelly parish was an anglicised border parish, and until the 1790s was mainly rural. But it underwent industrialisation, and the Church there faced stern and early competition from the Baptists and Independents.

Llanelly parish exhibited many of the weaknesses associated with the Established Church in Wales¹⁸. Sometime between 1608 and 1694 its Vicar had been replaced by a Curate, probably because of the overstretched resources of the Church, and the thinly inhabited nature of the district. Under this arrangement, the Rector of Llangattock had responsibility for that parish plus the perpetual curacies of Llanelly and Llangenny (which each had a resident curate)¹⁹. There was thus absenteeism, or pluralism, of a form.

The livings at Llanelly and Llangattock were subject to lay patronage, being in the gift of the Duke of Beaufort. The Duke duly bestowed the Rectorship of Llangattock on his son, who was not resident. The adjacent parish of Aberystroth, containing the Nantyglo and Blaina ironworks, lay in the gift of Lord Abergavenny (a big Monmouthshire landowner, who leased out much land to the Blaenavon ironworks), and the gift of Llanover parish (another perpetual curacy) was actually vested in the Blaenavon Iron Company²⁰.

One point in favour of Llanelly church was that it offered alternate services in Welsh. However, the Welsh speaking population was overwhelmingly Nonconformist, and the church's Welsh services were poorly attended²¹.

Llanelly parish church was described thus at the close of the eighteenth century:

'The floor was very slovenly, uneven and ill-paved. The seats irregular ... the reading desk shabbily patched up with odd ends of rough boards ... the roof, for the most part unceiled, and wholly out of repair²².

¹⁸ For these, see: I.G. Jones, *Explorations and Explanations*, pp.31-5

¹⁹ Revd. A. Griffiths, *Annals and Reminiscences of the Parish of Llanelly, Breconshire*, (Brecon, 1900), pp. 26-7.

²⁰ Kelly's Trade Directories, 1844, and 1858.

²¹ Revd. John Hughes, evidence to the Commission on Education in Wales, 1847, XXVII, Part II, Brecknock, p.98

²² Revd. Thomas Payne, MS quoted in Revd. D. Parry-Jones, *Llanelly Parish, Breconshire*, (South Wales Argus, 1963) article 8.

The state of the floor was probably due to:

'a custom adopted by the pride of country people in burying their dead within the churches [which] gives occasion to the too frequent and too shameful breaking up of the pavement'.

There were at this stage no chapel buildings in the parish, although Nonconformists were attending nearby chapels:

There are now no Romanists among us ... we have Anabaptists and Dissenters among us of different denominations, who frequent their conventicles in the parishes adjacent in the next county. We have, however, no Houses of Rimmon [i.e. chapels] within the parish²³.

The Church had a fairly low attendance in Llanelly parish on Census Sunday. Its percentage share of 6.14 was far behind that of the Baptists (35.26) and Independents (24.95) and only slightly higher than the Primitive Methodists, who had the lowest share of all (5.93). The percentage share of the Church across South Wales was 18.3. The parish church's seating capacity was 300, yet the morning service, held in English, was attended by only 122 plus 35 Sunday School scholars. The afternoon service, held in Welsh, was attended by only 45. A licensed lecture room near the Llanelly forge, with a capacity of 150 had a somewhat better attendance of 120 at its single evening service. This room had been licensed in 1842, 'in consequence of the parish church being inconveniently situated in regard to population'²⁴. It was probably the long room of the Old Beaufort Arms referred to earlier.

The major weakness of the parish church, and one it shared with many other areas, was that the industrial populations had grown up in another part of the parish,

²³ Revd. Thomas Payne, quoted in Revd. D. Parry-Jones, article 9

²⁴ I.G. Jones & D. Williams, return filed for Llanelly parish church, p.613

leaving the church stranded and remote from the densest concentrations of population. This is why Professor William remarks that the Established Church in Wales 'was the prisoner of its past ... the product of, and designed for a static rural society'²⁵. The problem of location in relation to the industrial communities was not confined to Welsh industrial parishes: G.E. Mingay writes that Nonconformism was strong in parishes in forest districts, because these parishes tended to be large and access to the parish church difficult²⁶.

Then there was the question of social milieu. The congregation at the parish church consisted primarily of substantial farmers and industrialists from the estates around Gilwern and the Usk valley:

'those who occupied prominent positions when I [the Reverend Arthur Griffiths] first came into the parish ... the Ansdells of Glaslyn, the Lawrences of Duffryn Mawr, Maunds of Tymawr, Williams of Aberbaiden, Jaynes of Pantybailau, and Pierces of Navigation House'²⁷.

The trustees and founder-members of chapels, on the other hand, were 'a mirror of the community'²⁸. The eleven trustees of Beersheba Particular Baptist chapel, on Llanelly Hill, consisted of the Minister of the mother church at Llanwenarth, Walter Lewis, a Gentleman, five colliers, two iron miners and two labourers.²⁹

The incumbent at Llanelly parish between 1849 and 1900 was the Reverend Arthur Griffiths who made great progress in reasserting the interests of the Church. Griffiths acquired church mission rooms at Darenfelen on Llanelly Hill, at Blackrock, and also a plot of land for a church at Gilwern. He was assisted financially by local

²⁵ Glanmor Williams, p.104

²⁶ G.E. Mingay, *Land and Society in England, 1750-1980*, (Longmans, 1994) p.84

²⁷ Griffiths, p. 8

²⁸ Muriel Bowen Evans, 'Nonconformity', in John Rowlands and others (Eds.), *Welsh Family History: a Guide to Research*, (Association of Family History Societies of Wales, 1993), 36-56, p.43

²⁹ Lease, John Powell and John Jones to the Trustees of the Particular Baptists, 24th March, 1839, Gwent CRO, D.591.19.281

ironmasters, with whom the Anglican clergy had close professional and personal links³⁰. The Clydach Iron Company provided a lecture room at the Llanelly forge (1842) and the Jayne family a mission room at Darenfelen (1881). The 'chief promoter and supporter' of the restoration of Llanelly parish church in 1868 was John Jayne, and at the same time a new burial ground was consecrated on land donated by the Nantyglo ironmaster, Sir Joseph Bailey.

Problems were most acute at Brynmawr, the most heavily populated part of the parish with no Anglican place of worship at all. Griffiths paid for an assistant curate at the town from his own resources, until the Church Pastoral Aid Society took over this burden. Services were held in the Town Hall, a licensed schoolroom (from 1850) and from 1863 a temporary building which later blew down in a gale. Griffiths obtained a donation of land from the Duke of Beaufort, and finance from the Nantyglo ironmaster Crawshay Bailey (who signed a blank cheque on his deathbed – perhaps with an eye to the immediate future) and Brynmawr acquired its first Anglican church in 1872³¹.

The Church did regain lost ground over the second half of the century. Morgan and Thomas state that the ratio of churches to chapels rose from 1:4 in the nineteenth century to 1:3 by 1905³². In that year, some 40% of the Welsh population went to some place of worship, and of these 25% were Anglican, 23% Independent, 23% Calvinistic Methodist, and 19% Baptist³³. In Breconshire in 1905, from a population of 59,907 (at the 1901 census) 12.03% (7,209) communicants were Anglican, and 25.70% (15,399) Nonconformist³⁴.

³⁰ Launcelot Powell, Edward Frere, and Griffiths were all magistrates. Powell was a churchwarden, and the Powell family Griffiths's 'late dear friends'.

³¹ Griffiths, p.24. Bailey had earlier offended ecclesiastical authority by proposing a single church to cater for Brynmawr and Nantyglo, heedless of the fact the towns lay in different dioceses.

³² Morgan and Thomas, p.167

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Royal Commission on the Church and other Religious Bodies in Wales, vol. v., but reproduced at Appendix B, in Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868-1922*, (Cardiff, 1963),

Relations between Anglicanism and Nonconformism

It is difficult to gauge the state of relations between Nonconformists and Anglicans. In the 1840s, Nonconformist parents objected to their children being taught the church catechism at the Clydach works school. Over twenty years later, a principal objection to Forster's Education Bill would be 'the absurdity ... of instruction in the catechism for nonconformist pupils'³⁵. There were oblique references in returns to the 1851 ecclesiastical census to the payment of church rates and tithes: 'Are thankful for the liberty we enjoy. Wish all to pay the expenses of their own religion'³⁶.

Griffiths adopted a conciliatory if realistic attitude towards Nonconformists in the parish:

Though not a whit behind the chiefest in loyalty and warm attachment to the Church of which I am an unworthy minister, I have never ceased to live in the closest amity with my Nonconforming parishioners, and have ever been able to co-operate with them on lines mutually free to us, and where no violation of principles deterred us from closer union³⁷.

According to Griffiths, Nonconformists gave 'substantial aid' to the restoration of the parish church in 1868, and when an Independent chapel at Blackrock was converted to a church mission room, 'many of the old Nonconforming members remained and became merged with our Church members'³⁸. The two forms of religion were not mutually exclusive: congregations at Blaenavon went directly from chapel to St. Peter's parish church, to hear the Reverend John Jones preach³⁹.

Llanelly parish church was always popular for Nonconformist burials:

³⁵ Henry Richard, quoted in Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, pp. 44-46

³⁶ I.G. Jones & David Williams, return for Bethlehem Particular Baptist chapel, pp. 617-8

³⁷ Griffiths, p.29

³⁸ Griffiths, p.19

³⁹ Lewis Browning, *Blaenavon, Monmouthshire: a Brief Historical Sketch*, (Minerva, 1906) p.59, Jones was incumbent between 1842-87.

They were large funerals in the old days. Indeed, they continue to be so, especially those from Llanelly Hill. Many remember large crowds coming down from Brynmawr and from the hills, singing all the way and carrying their comrades on their shoulders⁴⁰.

Muriel Bowen Evans has observed that 'for a long period some practising Nonconformists baptised and buried in the parish church because of family tradition'⁴¹. This seems to explain the popularity of Nonconformist burials at Llanelly parish:

many of the older people like to return to the Machpelah of the family. This applies, too, to the many families who left the parish for such places as Dowlais and Merthyr and other iron and steel towns in Monmouthshire and Glamorgan when the Clydach iron works closed soon after the middle of the century. To this day, the descendants in many cases wish to be gathered to their fathers at Llanelly⁴².

A funeral at the parish church had secular attractions, too, most notably the Five Bells public house opposite the church: 'occasionally, a weekend was made of it [funerals generally took place on a Saturday] and relatives had to fetch them home for Monday's work'⁴³.

The State of Religion on Llanelly Hill

Baptists from Llanwenarth chapel had been active on Llanelly Hill from the 1790s, preaching in the open and in private houses. The direct result of their efforts can be seen in the predominance of Beersheba Baptist chapel at the 1851 religious census.

⁴⁰ Parry-Jones, article 9

⁴¹ Muriel Bowen Evans, p.52

⁴² Parry-Jones, article 9

⁴³ Ibid.

Beersheba (built 1836), was one of three places of worship on the Hill, the other two being Carmel Welsh Calvinistic Methodist chapel (1842) and an Independent schoolroom which was a branch of Siloam chapel at Clydach (1829). In addition, Beersheba held religious services in a rented apartment. There was no place of worship for the Established Church. These three places of worship served a population of 1,822. Details of the two chapels are given in table 6.5.

Table 6.5 - Religious denominations on Llanelly Hill, 1851

Chapel	Seating Capacity	Ac/I	Total Attendance	A/R	P/S
Beersheba*	362	19.87	919	50.44	69.31
Carmel	224	12.29	407	22.34	30.69
Total	586	32.16	1,326	72.78	100.00

* includes rented apartment

The above table excludes standing room of 30 returned for Beersheba chapel. No capacity was given for Beersheba's rented apartment, so, as a substitute, the highest attendance has been taken. This was 64, but must be open to question, as the room measured only ten feet by eleven. The total attendance at Beersheba was some three times its seating capacity due to the fact there was more than one service.

The accommodation index (Ac/I) shows that only 32.16% of Llanelly Hill's population could be accommodated at places of worship. The attendance rate (A/R) was 72.78, though the true figure would have been rather higher as this figure excludes attendances at the Independent schoolroom at Darenfelen, and a small number of Anglicans who attended the parish church.

The figures below show the accommodation and attendance rates for Llanelly Hill, Llanelly parish, and the four Breconshire Registration Districts. It will be remembered that the Crickhowell Registration District contained the industrial parishes, whilst the remainder of the county was largely agricultural.

Area	Ac/I	A/R
Llanelly Hill	32	73
Builth RD	75	61
Hay RD	80	59
Brecknock RD	84	91
Crickhowell RD	85	101
Llanelly Parish	87	105

These figures show generally that the higher the accommodation rate, the higher the attendances, though the districts of Builth and Hay are an exception to this. The Crickhowell district and Llanelly parish had the highest accommodation and attendance rates, belying the notion that religion would be weakest in industrialised areas. On the other hand, the mining settlement on Llanelly Hill did have low accommodation and attendance rates (though the attendance rate was higher than for the rural areas of Builth and Hay).

Llanelly Hill's accommodation rate compares unfavourably with at least one rural community of a similar size: Nefyn in north-west Wales (population 1,854 to Llanelly Hill's 1,822) had six places of worship compared to Llanelly Hill's three. Nefyn lay in the Pwllhelli Registration District on the Llyn Peninsula, and its population comprised small farmers, fishermen and craftsmen, with a small number of quarrymen. Its accommodation rate was 96.17, compared with 32.16 for Llanelly Hill⁴⁴.

However, Llanelly Hill's attendance rate was on a par with Mills's rate of 71.4 for rural areas and small towns, and higher than the rates he gives for large towns of over 10,000 population (49.7) and 61 for the whole of England and Wales (61.0)⁴⁵. The argument that religion was weakest in industrial areas probably applies best to large urban settlements, which Llanelly Hill and parish were not. The sometimes peculiar characteristics of religious life in Wales also need to be taken into account.

⁴⁴ I.G. Jones, *Explorations and Explanations*, p.220-221

⁴⁵ D.R. Mills, *Lord and Peasant in Nineteenth Century Britain*, (Croom Helm 1980) p.178

The largest Welsh town of the time was Merthyr Tydfil, which, with a population of around 63,000, was a large town by Mill's definition. Yet Merthyr had an attendance rate of 88, meaning that, of the 65 largest towns in England and Wales, only Colchester had a higher attendance rate at 89.5. Industrialised Monmouthshire, with an attendance rate of 73.3, compared well with the English industrialised counties (for example, 58.8 in Derbyshire, 44.1 in Lancashire) and even with some rural counties (49.0 in Herefordshire, 41.9 in Surrey) though less so with other rural counties (104.6 in Bedfordshire, 94.2 in Huntingdonshire).

The Strength of Chapel Membership on Llanelly Hill

The strength of a chapel was linked to the economic circumstances of the community it served. Professor Bowen demonstrated a close link between the prosperity of Peniel Baptist chapel in Carmarthen and the tin-works which provided local employment⁴⁶. But there were other factors. Professor Morgan feels that the personality of the minister had an important role: 'Ultimately, one suspects, the 'big guns' of the pulpit gained their mass appeal not from the theological or the literary content of their fiery sermons but from the populist impact of their own personalities'⁴⁷.

The history of Beersheba chapel reflects both viewpoints. At its formation in 1836, its membership numbered 39. During the nationwide cholera epidemic of 1847-8 the chapel's membership rose to reach 250 by May 1850. In 1848, when the epidemic was at its height, the chapel was enlarged and a house provided for its Pastor, quite probably aided by increased collections. Other local chapels also noted that the 'revival of religion which followed the Cholera (1848) in this county was extraordinary in all chapels and churches'⁴⁸.

The direct effect of industrial prosperity on a chapel was evident in the collapse of the Clydach works in 1861. Unemployment and the resulting out-migration

⁴⁶ H. Carter & W.K.D. Davies (Eds.), *Geography, Culture and Habitat: Selected Essays of E.G. Bowen, 1925-1975*, (Gomer Press, 1976), p.105

⁴⁷ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980*, (Oxford, 1981), p.18

⁴⁸ I.G. Jones and D. Williams, p. 615.

'caused the removal of a large number of members and hearers. The church [Beersheba] was reduced to less than half of its 235 members'⁶¹. Apart from losing members, economic hardship greatly reduced a chapel's collections. The Clydach works had struggled for some years prior to its closure, and the Reverend Thomas Lewis, Minister at Bethlehem, recorded in his diary for 6th December, 1857: 'The low state of trade tells fearfully on our collections. Great reductions have been made in the wages of the workmen and hundreds unemployed'⁴⁹. Bethlehem's collections could only be taken monthly during the ensuing poverty, later fortnightly, but not weekly until 1913.

Figure 6.1 shows how membership levels at Beersheba were influenced by events both internal and external to the chapel.

The personality of ministers could also affect the well-being of a chapel. Thomas Lewis began his pastorate at Bethlehem Baptist Chapel, he noted, on 4th May, 1856, that 'the church is low: there had been divisions in the time of Mr Dan Davies'⁵⁰. Membership levels of Beersheba fell to 178 in 1877, 175 in 1882, and dramatically to 53 in 1887. This occurred against a succession of pastors whose ministries were of comparatively short duration, including one who died of pneumonia and another who was obliged to emigrate to the United States after 'meddling in matters which led him into difficulties'⁵¹. Its nadir of 53 members was reached after a spell of five years without any pastor.

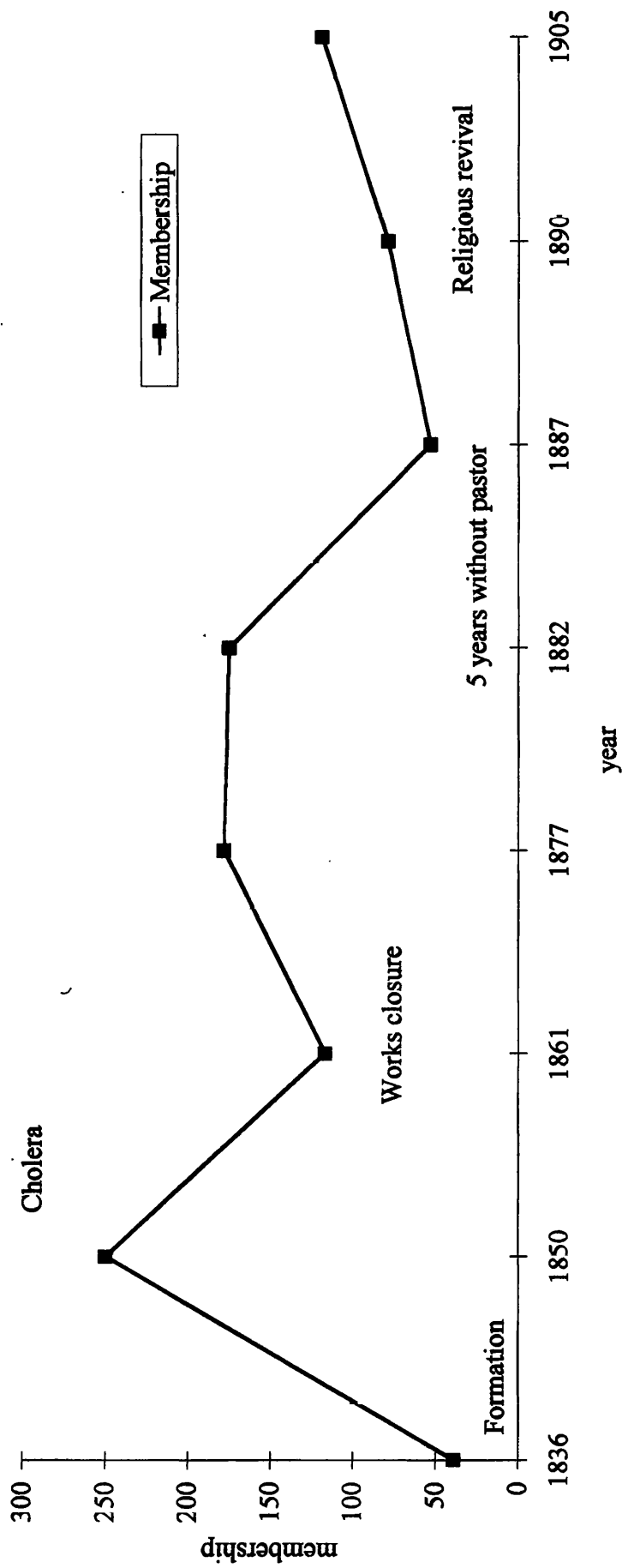
In 1860, a third chapel was built on Llanelly Hill, at Llamarch. This was Mount Sion, a Wesleyan Methodist chapel. By 1905, all three chapels were showing signs of having benefited from the religious revival that took place in Wales between 1903-5, and which has been referred to earlier. Both Carmel and Mount Sion chapels

⁴⁹ Lewis, p.91

⁵⁰ Quoted in Revd. D. Parry-Jones, article 17

⁵¹ Rev. William Jones, *The Church at Beersheba, Darenfelen*, (n. pub., 1906), (unpaginated) Gwent CRO.

Fig. 6.1 Membership of Beersheba Baptist chapel, Llanelly Hill, 1836-1905



on Llanelly Hill were extended or rebuilt around the time of this revival: Carmel in 1902, and Mount Sion in 1903⁵².

By 1905, Beersheba's membership had risen to 119 communicants, with an average non-communicant attendance of 90. Table 6.6 shows the strengths of the three chapels on Llanelly Hill in that year.

Table 6.6 - Religious Denominations on Llanelly Hill, 1905

Chapel	Beersheba	Carmel	Mount Sion
Denomination	Baptist	Calvinistic Methodist	Wesleyan
Date of foundation	1836	1842	1860
Seating	450	240	250
Communicants	119	56	60
Non-communicants	90	90	90
Sunday School scholars	155	110	136
Sunday School teachers	13	9	11
Deacons	7	1	3
Property value (£)	1,000	600	500
Total contributions (£)	170	43	82

Source: Royal Commission on Church etc. in Wales, 1911, VI, p.20

These figures partly reflect the religious revival, of course, but clearly show Beersheba was still the most important of the three chapels. In addition to the numbers attending at these three chapels, there was the Independent schoolroom and, from the 1880s, a church mission room at Darenfelen. The total seating provided by these three chapels was 940, compared with 586 in 1851. Considering the decline in population of some 36.44% between 1851 and 1891 (which probably declined further to 1905) the accommodation rate would have been considerably higher in 1905 than 1851.

Comparing the 1905 survey with the 1851 ecclesiastical census is difficult because the data was collected and presented in different ways. Total average attendance at religious services on Llanelly Hill in 1851 were 300 for Beersheba and 152 for Carmel, totalling 452. If the numbers of communicants are added to the average number of non-communicants attending in 1905 (perhaps the closest basis for

⁵² Royal Commission on the Church of England and Wales, 1905, Vol.VI, Nonconformist County Statistics, Breconshire, p.20

comparison that can be obtained) the total attendance arrived at is 505. This is an 11% increase over 1851, against a 36% drop in the overall population. Likewise, Beersheba's Sunday School was better attended in 1905 than 1851, despite the advent of Board Schools and compulsory elementary education.

The effect of the religious revival cannot be discounted when considering the position of religion in 1905, and there remains the possibility that religion had declined in importance, but that this long term decline was concealed by the revival. But the evidence suggests that religion remained as popular as ever. A new chapel and church mission room had been added to Llanelly Hill since 1851 and, in 1887, a local resident wrote that 'religion takes a very fair hold of this place'⁵³. In addition, membership of the four leading denominations in Wales (the Baptists, Methodists, Independents, and Wesleyans) had shown a steady advance in numbers from 1861 to 1903. This was followed by the dramatic increase of the revival years, and it was only after 1905 that numbers began to fall, followed by an almost continuous decline since the First World War⁵⁴.

The Role played by Religion

D.R. Mills, writing about textile villages, states that 'schools, mechanics' institutes, and chapels were a means of gaining obedience'⁵⁵. He adds:

Social control of the labourers by the squire and parson through the medium of the established church is perhaps fairly obvious, but it would be wrong to ignore the power of the deacons or other elders in a nonconformist church over their congregation⁵⁶.

⁵³ William Luther, *Llanelly Hill and its Antiquities*, (n. pub., 1887) p.7

⁵⁴ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, Appendix C, p.314

⁵⁵ Mills, p.217

⁵⁶ Mills, p.126

Welsh Nonconformism has been viewed in the same way by I.G. Jones, referring to a period of social stability following unrest on the South Wales coalfield in the 1830s and early 40s:

If religion helped to produce a disciplined workforce, as undoubtedly it did, so too did religion begin to civilise and humanise industry ... It was for their own good that religious organisations preached the virtues of peace and social harmony⁵⁷.

Nonconformism promoted many qualities that might be seen as desirable by employers and those in authority, including temperance and orderliness. Politically the chapel leadership early on disapproved of industrial action, unionism, and Chartism. In the violent climate of 1832, the Calvinistic Methodists went so far as to threaten to excommunicate any of their members who joined unions. Certainly, employers helped provide places of worship. Hill and Hopkins, the Blaenavon ironmasters, built a church for their workforce, as did Crawshay and Joseph Bailey at Beaufort and Nantyglo. In 1839 the Clydach Iron Company let the land for Beersheba Baptist chapel at Darenfelen, Llanelly Hill, charging only 1 shilling per annum rent, and supplying free lime for the building of the chapel⁵⁸. In 1874, the company also let the schoolroom at Penfyddlwn on Llanelly Hill used by Siloam's Independents and, in the same year, leased land to the Llanelly School Board⁵⁹. Later the company provided and converted the old company shop for use as a church mission room.

Not all historians share this view of religion as producing an orderly law-abiding population. Gwyn Williams wrote 'Before mid-century only the Calvinistic Methodists seem to have played the social control role unhesitatingly allotted to them

⁵⁷ I.G. Jones, *The Valleys in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, p.24

⁵⁸ Lease, John Powell and John Jones to trustees of Particular Baptists; Gwent RO, D591.19.281.

⁵⁹ Leasehold for trustees of Siloam, Gwent RO, D591.19.373, and lease to School Board of Llanelly, Breconshire, Gwent RO, D591.19.282

by English historians⁶⁰. Mills highlights the fact that the chapels were a school in working class leadership:

The chapel, where farmer and labourer, shopkeeper and industrial worker, were on an equality and conducted their own affairs, proved to be a school in democratic management. The Welsh peasantry had hitherto been remarkable for its servility, but this now disappeared⁶¹.

Nonconformist chapels afforded people an opportunity at self-government in at least one aspect of their lives. Apart from the deacons and trustees of chapels, working men provided the pool from which ordained ministers were drawn. Beersheba chapel's most prominent pastor was the blacksmith, Benjamin Williams (1844-1866), 'a man of prayer, a noted singer, a powerful preacher'⁶². His successor was Daniel Jones, a coal miner ordained in 1873, who continued to work underground. Several other coal miners on Llanelly Hill were Wesleyan lay preachers. More broadly, Jennings makes the point in relation to Brynmawr that, with the advent of compulsory elementary education, the working class leadership of the town derived its education from the state system not the chapels, with the result that Nonconformity lost much of its political power-base⁶³.

In Wales, Nonconformism became linked with Liberal politics. Nonconformism had always had its own political objectives, which it pursued through the Liberation Society⁶⁴. The questions of tithes, control of education, and, ultimately, the Disestablishment of the Church, were all political questions. This link between religion and popular politics was demonstrated at the 1868 election (the first after the 1867 Reform Act) when the Nonconformist Henry Richard was returned for the

⁶⁰ Gwyn A. Williams, *When was Wales?*, (Penguin, 1985), p.189

⁶¹ Mills, p.168

⁶² Revd. William Jones, *The Church at Beersheba* (unpaginated).

⁶³ Hilda Jennings, *Brynmawr: the Study of a Distressed Area*, (Allenson, 1934), p.123

⁶⁴ Founded in 1844, the Society became active in Wales from about 1862.

second Merthyr Tydfil seat, ahead of Gladstone's Home Secretary, H. A. Bruce, and the industrialist Fothergill. The Liberal-Nonconformist Welsh parliamentary presence resulted in the Welsh Sunday Closing Act (1881) and the Disestablishment of the Church in 1914 (suspended until 1920).

Aside from parliamentary representation, chapels often provided the only places where public meetings could be held, other than public houses. In 1847, a witness to the Education Commission – the Brynmawr grocer and draper Thomas Kershaw – reported that Chartists had 'entered the chapels and pressed the people to join them'⁶⁵. Nonconformism was also the breeding ground for political leaders, and not just in Wales: 'Nonconformity in general, and lay preachers in particular, played a major role in the agricultural labourers' unions ... in the 1870s'⁶⁶. The best example of this was the lay preacher Joseph Arch, who led the National Agricultural Labourers' Union. In the Weald of Sussex, Wesleyanism taught its adherents 'to think and act with independence' and in the Oxfordshire parishes of Woodstock and Wootten, Methodism 'taught the leaders how to organise'⁶⁷.

The importance of religion should not be overstated. A third of the population of Llanelly Hill did not attend any religious service in 1851. Even those who did go to chapel might not take religious teaching to heart: 'immediately the service is over, they all flock to the beer shops and public houses'⁶⁸. In 1847, children at the Clydach works school and at Brynmawr lacked even the most basic religious knowledge⁶⁹. Chapels were not even sacrosanct: thieves broke into Bethlehem chapel in 1858 and stole the brass candlesticks. Then there were those like Lewis Jones, a master blacksmith at the Clydach Ironworks, a 'professed infidel [who] cursed chapel-goers in his very heart'⁷⁰.

⁶⁵ Evidence of Thomas Kershaw to Commission on Education in Wales, 1847, PP, vol. XXVII, Part II, p.75

⁶⁶ Mingay, p.86

⁶⁷ Richard Heath, *The Victorian Peasant*, ed. by Keith Dockray, (Sutton, 1989), pp.102 and 172.

⁶⁸ Report of the Commissioners into the operation of the Mines Act and the State of the Population in the Mining Districts, PP, 1846, XXIV, p.36. This observation related to Pontypool in 1846.

⁶⁹ Education Commission, 1847, PP, XXVII, pp. 133-4

⁷⁰ Reverend Thomas Lewis, *My Life's History: the Autobiography of the Reverend Thomas Lewis*, (Newport & Bristol, 1902), entry for 20th March, 1859. It ought to be said that Jones repented of his ways and was baptised.

Religion and Patterns of Migration

In the nineteenth century, the Baptists and Independents were the most important religious denominations in Llanelly parish. Their churches were local and pre-dated the industrial era, and their evangelising amongst the new industrial settlements laid the basis for their hegemony in the nineteenth century. The Baptist chapels at Beersheba on Llanelly Hill, and at Bethlehem in Maesygartha, were both daughter churches of the ancient establishment at Llanwenarth. Both were built fairly early (1830 and 1836) as was the Independent chapel at Siloam, Clydach (1829).

Many English in-migrants were Baptists. There was an English Baptist chapel at Brynmawr from 1836⁷¹, and the pressure for English speaking Baptist chapels became pressing:

Many English speaking people [were] employed in the different branches of ironmaking. Many of them were Baptists and ... the growing need of an English Baptist Chapel had been for some time fully recognised⁷².

The immediate need was met by the building of Nazareth chapel (1851), a founder member of which, Andrew Cross, lived at Llanelly Hill, followed by Hope Baptist chapel (1876), built to cater for English speaking Baptists unable to follow services in Welsh at Llanwenarth.

In 1851, the next most important denomination was Welsh Calvinistic Methodism, probably introduced by 'Welshmen from Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire, from Montgomeryshire and the uplands of Breconshire [who] brought Welsh Calvinistic Methodism with them'⁷³. There were few migrants from the first two counties on Llanelly Hill, but there had been extensive in-migration from the

⁷¹ W.E. Minchinton, 'The Place of Brecknock in the Industrialisation of South Wales', *Brycheiniog*, VII, 1961, p.41

⁷² Revd. William Jones, *The Church at Nazareth, Clydach*, (unpaginated)

⁷³ I.G. Jones, *The Valleys in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, p.23

Breconshire uplands: Calvinistic Methodism had 13,751 adherents in Breconshire, which made it the second strongest denomination, just behind the Independents, with 13,886⁷⁴. It was this in-migration that resulted in the building of Carmel chapel on Llanelly Hill in 1842.

Next in importance were Wesleyan Methodists, with the Welsh speaking variety having rather more prominence than the English. Methodist sects were generally English speaking in the early days of industrialisation, at least at the eastern end of the coalfield. The later in-migration of Welsh speaking Wesleyan Methodists from western parts of Wales brought about the linguistic divide between Welsh and English Wesleyanism, which was apparent on the coalfield from the 1830s⁷⁵. English speaking Wesleyans 'penetrated along with immigrants from England'⁷⁶ and owed their presence to the closeness of the English border. Mount Sion, an English Wesleyan Methodist chapel, was built on Llanelly Hill in 1860, as part of the increasing tendency to build English speaking chapels in Llanelly parish over the second half of the century.

The Church lagged behind most Nonconformist denominations. A small number of people from Llanelly Hill attended the parish church, and a mission room was provided there in 1881. The strength of Anglicanism depends on whose view is preferred: 'a goodly company of church goers' according to the Anglican incumbent, but 'one small Church Mission room with a small audience' according to local resident, William Luther. Anglicans may have originated from the English border counties and rural parts of Wales where the Church was stronger. The parish church was also the only place to offer religious services in English for a long while, which may have made attractive to monoglot English in-migrants.

Nowhere was the influx of different peoples more pronounced in their places of worship than in Brynmawr. In-migration of English, Irish and Scottish workers can

⁷⁴ Poole, p.332. These figures are for 1885.

⁷⁵ I.G. Jones, *The Valleys in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, p.23

⁷⁶ Gwyn A. Williams, p.189

be traced in Calvary chapel (English Particular Baptist), the Roman Catholic church (1863) and Bailey Street Congregational Church (1876). Later, there would be an influx of Eastern Europeans and Jewish shopkeepers, so that by 1901 Brynmawr had a Hebrew synagogue.

Chapter 7

Education

Circulating Schools

For much of the nineteenth century, the subject of education was closely linked to that of religion, and indeed language. This was also the case prior to the nineteenth century, when one of the most successful forms of education in Wales was the Circulating School. This peripatetic system, devised by the Reverend Griffith Jones of Llanddowror, aimed at teaching adults and children to read the Bible in Welsh. Classes were often held in the evening, to fit around the hours of agricultural work, and over the winter months when agricultural activity was at its lowest. The schools generally sat in the parish church or a farm for a three months session, before moving on, often returning for further sessions at a later date. The idea was not entirely novel: the SPCK (the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge) had encouraged 'ambulatory schools' in Scotland, for example.

During the period 1736 to 1776, a total of 6,321 Circulating Schools were established and it was 'probably true to say that half the population of Wales at this time attended a circulating school'¹. In Monmouthshire alone, in the period 1738 to 1775, 424 Circulating Schools were founded, attended by 18,555 pupils². The schools were widespread, and a number of sessions were held in the parish of Llanelly during the 1770s. Canon D. Parry-Jones, apparently obtaining his information from the manuscripts of the Reverend Thomas Payne, mentions the following Circulating Schools in the parish³:

¹ D.A. Pretty, 'Education Records', in Rowlands (Ed.), *Welsh Family History: a Guide to Research*, (Association of Family History Societies of Wales, 1993) p.157

² John Williams, *The Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, Vol.2, (Welsh Office, 1985) p.202

³ Cannon D. Parry-Jones, *Llanelly Parish, Breconshire*, (series of articles, South Wales Argus, 1963) article 11.

Table 7.1 - Circulating Schools in Llanelly Parish, 1756-77

Session	Location	No. of pupils
1756-7	The Common (Gilwern)	Not given
1770-1	Not given	109
	Not given	107
1771-2	Twyn-yr-Hebog	40
	Twyn-yr-Hebog	70
1772-3	Parish church	45
1774-5	Llanelly forge	46
1776-7	Twyn-yr-Hebog	49

Source: D. Parry-Jones, *Llanelly Parish, Breconshire*, South Wales Argus, 1963, article 11

From these figures, it can be seen that the Circulating Schools visited annually for a seven year period between 1770 and 1777 and were well attended. The 1774-1775 session, held at Llanelly forge, may have been aimed at the early industrial community. The Circulating Schools movement declined sharply from 1779 with the death of Revd. Jones's successor, Madam Bevan, and the 1776-7 session was the last recorded in Llanelly parish.

Day Schools and Works Schools

The Circulating Schools left something of a vacuum following the system's collapse. In 1785, the Rural Dean, the Reverend Payne, wrote of Llanelly parish that: 'There are no endowments for either schools or hospitals ... a little day school is occasionally opened by permission of the rector where reading is taught by an old person for a livelihood.'⁴ One of the earliest known dame schools in Llanelly parish was started in 1790, by a widow, Ann Helkins, who ran a day school in her cottage at Cae Robin. From 1794, Molly Davies and her daughter Jane ran a school at their home, some 40 yards from the forge⁵. One of her pupils went on to employment at the Clydach

⁴ Parry-Jones, article 11. Much of the detail of early day schools which follows, including quotations, is gleaned from newspaper articles by a local resident, William Hicks, apparently written in the 1890s. I have been unable to locate the original articles, but have relied on excerpts taken from them in the articles by Canon Parry-Jones.

⁵ Molly Davies was reputed to be a witch, who turned milk sour and made pigs stand on their head. Her magic was apparently blamed for many accidents at the works.

company offices, which suggests a basic literacy and numeracy, but there is no other evidence as to the standard of her school.

Works' schools were a particularly important source of education in the South Wales iron district. The first Clydach works school was established in 1805 by Edward Frere as a reaction to the ignorance of his workers⁶. Frere utilised a vacant house in Forge Row, paid the master's salary, and supplied teaching materials, including copies of *The Times*. Classes were held at 8.00 a.m. and 7.00 p.m. to accommodate both the day and night shifts.

In the period to about 1820, day and works schools offered only a most rudimentary education. The school premises were often unsuitable, including a disused hayloft and a house built under the charging arch of a blast furnace. The teachers were usually elderly women or disabled men, unable to take up any more gainful employment, and whose abilities were severely limited. The first teacher at the Clydach works school was John Dawson, an ex-sailor missing a leg and several fingers, whom Frere had first taken on as a gardener. Where they were not disabled, they were sometimes rogues: one of the most successful day school teachers (his curriculum extended to French and the violin) fled the parish having stolen some clothes. Other teachers had less to offer: Dawson's successor at the Clydach work school was appointed solely on his ability to chalk verse on the works floor, whilst a pupil at a dame school was obliged to leave once he was able to spell 'bow', 'cow' and 'dog', because he had surpassed his teacher's ability in English.

Sunday Schools

The link between education and religion was best demonstrated by the Sunday School. Professor Glanmor Williams has written that: '... Welsh Sunday Schools were for more than a century the most powerful medium of popular education in Wales, and ... were

⁶ Frere apparently returned from a business trip to find his workers packed and ready to leave, fearing a French invasion following the death of Nelson (news of which had taken several weeks to filter through to them).

intended as much for adults as children⁷. The Sunday School originated with Raikes in England, and the first Sunday Schools in Wales appeared in the North, in the 1780s and 90s, out of an attempt to revive the Circulating Schools. The movement in Wales was pioneered by the Methodist Thomas Charles of Bala. It gained impetus at the turn of the century, and spread to industrial South Wales by means of migration of population from the North. The first Sunday School at Llanelly was held in the long room of the old Beaufort Arms, by 'John the North' (John Jones), an ironstone mason from North Wales⁸. By 1818, 315 Sunday Schools had been established in Wales attended by 25,000 pupils⁹.

Sunday Schools were popular for a number of reasons. They taught adults as well as children (which day schools did not). Their language was usually Welsh, whereas that of day schools was often English. Children did not lose wages by attending them, as they would do a day school, and they were popular with Nonconformists who preferred Voluntaryism to schools run by either the British or National Societies. The National Society was an Anglican body, of course, whereas the British Society was officially non-denominational, but both societies received grants from central government from the 1830s, which aroused Nonconformist suspicions of state interference. Though the aims of the Sunday School were religious, their curricula could be surprisingly broad. In the 1850s, Bethlehem Baptist chapel ran a:

weekly class in chapel of young men who studied English grammar, and the rudiments of general knowledge. Also a class going through Mr Richard Mill's grammar of music [and] a "Singing School" to improve our Sunday worship¹⁰.

⁷ Glanmor Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality in Wales*, (Cardiff, 1979), p.215

⁸ Arthur Griffiths, *Annals and Reminiscences of the Parish of Llanelly*, (Brecon, 1900), p.19. The school was refurbished by the Clydach Iron Company as many of its workers attended.

⁹ John Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, (Welsh Office, 1985), II, pp.201, 212

¹⁰ Revd. Thomas Lewis, *My Life's History: the Autobiography of the Reverend Thomas Lewis*, (Newport and Bristol, 1902), entry for 16th July, 1859.

Education was one field where figures connected with Llanelly parish had some importance nationally. Thomas Price, the curate from 1816 to c.1825, was a renowned celtic historian of his day, and a leading figure in the eisteddfod movement¹¹. From 1818 he ran a Sunday School in the parish together with three Methodists, who later gained control of the school. Price held strong views on education and the Welsh language:

I hope there will be a general movement in the country on the score of teaching the Welsh language in our weekly schools ... Had we made the knowledge of Welsh a 'sine qua non' in the Principality, we should not now have had so many strangers among us to take the bread out of our mouths in the lucrative situations of Church and State¹².

Price founded a Welsh speaking school at Gellyfelen, on Llanelly Hill in 1820, and placed great emphasis on the study of the language¹³. According to a local historian, Price argued with a school inspector over the methods used in examining a pupil at the school. The dispute transferred to the letters pages of *The Times*, and lent impetus to the cause of the British Schools in South Wales¹⁴.

The Census of Schools, conducted nationally in 1851, recorded almost twice as many day schools as Sunday Schools, there being 44,836 of the former and 23,173 of the latter¹⁵. In England and Wales, 44.3% of people under 20 were enrolled at day schools, and 49.7% at Sunday Schools¹⁶. The attendance figures were 36.9% and 37.7% respectively. The balance between day and Sunday Schools was thus roughly

¹¹ See entry in Dictionary of Welsh Biography (Hon. Society of Cymmrodorion, 1959), p.791.

¹² Letter to T. Richards, 10th December, 1833, quoted in W.R. Jones, p.46

¹³ W.R. Jones, p.46

¹⁴ Emlyn Edwards, *Chronology of Llanelly Parish Industry* (n. pub., 1968) (unpaginated).

¹⁵ B.I. Coleman, 'The Incidence of Education in Mid-Century', in E.A. Wrigley (Ed.), *Nineteenth Century Society, Essays in the Use of Quantative Methods for the Study of Social Data.*, (Cambridge, 1972) p.399.

¹⁶ Ibid.

equal in terms of enrolment and attendance. If Wales is taken alone the situation was different: in 1851, 102,221 pupils attended day schools (of all types), but nearly three times as many (296,000) attended Sunday Schools (of all denominations). The same situation prevailed in Llanelly parish. The Education Commission of 1847 reported that, with a population of 7,366, the parish of Llanelly had 18 Sunday Schools and 10 day schools (including the Clydach works' school)¹⁷. The attendance at those schools was as follows¹⁸:

	No. Attending	% of Total Pop.
Day Schools	634	(8.61)
Sunday Schools (Church)	111	(1.51)
Sunday Schools (Dissenting)	2,398	(32.55)
Total	3,143	(42.76)

Sunday School attendance would have included adults as well as children. Dissenting Sunday Schools were by far the largest providers of education in the parish, day schools came a poor second, whilst attendance at church Sunday Schools was almost negligible. However, figures given for two of the day schools show them to have been fairly large: 242 children were enrolled at the Clydach Works' school and 113 at the Glaslyn National School (Gilwern).

By 1851, the population of Llanelly Hill had reached 1,822. The religious census of that year revealed 170 Sunday school scholars at Beersheba Baptist chapel, plus a further 56 at its rented apartment, and 130 scholars at Carmel Calvinistic Methodist chapel. There was also the Independent schoolroom belonging to Siloam chapel, for which figures were not given¹⁹. In addition, the miner Andrew Cross held a

¹⁷ Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the State of Education in Wales, 1847, Vol. XXVII, Part II, Brecknock, pp. 214-215 and 216-217 for day schools, and pp. 244-245 for Sunday Schools.

¹⁸ Education Commission, Vol. XXVII, p. 9

¹⁹ Figures given for Census Sunday and average attendances over the past year were the same in all cases.

Sunday School at his home on Llanelly Hill, probably aimed at English speaking immigrants, since Cross was a founder member of Nazareth English speaking Baptist chapel.

Attendance at Beersheba and Carmel's Sunday Schools amounted to 19.54% of the population of Llanelly Hill, which was considerably below the parish figure of 34.06% in 1847, but not too far off the figure of 25.45% for Wales²⁰.

The Role of Education

In the political climate of late eighteenth century, education, or at least literacy, may not have been viewed as a particularly desirable thing, since a literate population would have access to the radical ideas and philosophies then appearing in print. This viewpoint was to change following the social upheavals of the 1830s, a decade which, in South Wales, began with the Merthyr Riot, ended with the Chartist attack on Newport, and in between was punctuated with the Rebecca Riots, and violent strikes on the coalfield. On the broader stage, this decade also witnessed the Reform movement, Chartism, riots at places as diverse as Nottingham and Bristol, and the 'Captain Swing' Riots in rural areas. Anxious for a means to quell such disturbances, the authorities came to see education as a panacea – a view promulgated in parliamentary debate by Lord John Russell. Dr Kay-Shuttleworth (later Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, Secretary to the Privy Council Committee on Education) stated in 1846 that: 'the school was to raise a new race of working people - respectful, cheerful, hard-working, loyal, pacific, and religious'²¹. Mingay writes, in the context of rural poverty, 'The nineteenth century panacea for poverty (and unrest) was education... thrift and sobriety would replace idleness and fecklessness'²². Thus the Committee of Council on Education was established in 1839, and government grants to the British and National Societies extended.

²⁰ This figure is based on the numbers of pupils said to be at Sunday Schools by Williams, in *The Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, p.212.

²¹ Quoted in Richard Heath, *The Victorian Peasant*, ed. by Keith Dockray (Sutton, 1989) p.86

²² G.E. Mingay, *Land and Society in England, 1750-1980*, (Longmans, 1994) p.100.

The Committee's inspector for British Society schools was the barrister, Seymour Tremenheere. Tremenheere was despatched to South Wales in 1839, shortly after the Chartist march on Newport, to report on the state of education in the South Wales mining areas. He described a population steeped in vice and drunkenness, and estimated that some 70% of children who should have been attending day school did not. There was a lack of schools, which he blamed partly on ironmasters whom he felt needed to accept some responsibility for the wellbeing of their workforce. This scarcity of educational provision was commonly found in industrial areas and was particularly acute for example in English cities, the Black Country, and Staffordshire²³.

Tremenheere was later appointed Commissioner for the operation of the Mines Act and in that capacity produced a further report on the South Wales mining areas in 1846, when, despite some improvement since his last visit, there remained problems with ignorance, drunkenness and 'sensuality'. Tremenheere felt the lack of educational facilities encouraged adults to resort to the beerhouse because it deprived them of other means of recreation. He cited the example of the Blaenavon Ironworks, where a school had been built in 1815. There had apparently been no disturbances at the works since their inception, and the town had played no part in the 1839 Chartist insurrection²⁴.

It was suggested in a previous chapter that the evidence for religion being seen or utilised as a 'civilising' force is at least equivocal. The evidence is far clearer in the case of education. The emphasis in the 1830s and 40s was not on increasing religious provision, but on creating more schools. In practice, this came to mean works schools. Professor I.G. Jones describes education in this period as 'mainly a means of exerting a more effective control over the working classes'²⁵. There were three reports to central government on education in the South Wales iron district between 1839 and 1847. In

²³ I.G. Jones, *Mid-Victorian Wales, the Observers and the Observed*, (Cardiff, 1992), p.118

²⁴ Report of the Commissioners into the Operation of the Mines Act and State of the Population in the Mining Districts, Report on South Wales, PP, 1846, p.34

²⁵ I.G. Jones, p.124

Llanelly parish, five out of six day schools were founded in the 1840s, including the Clydach works school in 1842. Between 1700 and 1900, 138 works schools were established in Wales, most in the south and some substantial in size²⁶. The rate of provision reached a peak in the 1840s, when 39 were built²⁷. (A second peak was reached in the 1870s, when 21 schools were founded, probably in response to the 1870 Education Act).

The Education Commission of 1847

By the time the Commission on Education in Wales was appointed in 1847, the agenda had already been set by Tremenhoe's earlier reports. The Commission painted a picture of the Welsh as backward, intemperate, and licentious, and blamed their ignorance largely on Nonconformism and the Welsh language. The Commission consisted of three English barristers, who took much of their evidence from Anglican squires and clergymen. Complaints that they were biased were probably justified, though the ultimate conclusions on the lamentable state of Welsh education seem reasonably accurate.

The Report, dubbed *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision*, or the Treason of the Blue Books, was received badly in Wales. It was one of the catalysts that helped turn some Nonconformist sects towards political involvement. It also scandalised patriotic and prominent Anglicans, including the former Llanelly curate, Thomas Price, and the Mayor of Newport, Sir Thomas Phillips. Phillips had been born at Ynys-y-Garth in Clydach, and was a devout Anglican and keen educationalist. He became Chairman of the Church's Welsh Education Committee, and, according to W.R. Jones, his treatise on Welsh education was still regarded as a standard work in 1966.²⁸

²⁶ Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, vol.2, p.202

²⁷ Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, vol. 2, p.202

²⁸ Sir Thomas Phillips, 1801-1867, became Mayor of Newport in 1838, and was knighted for his part in the defence of that town against the Chartist Rising of 1839. The work Jones refers to is *Wales, the Language, Social Condition, Moral Character, and Religious Opinions of the People considered in relation to Education*, 1849: see entry in *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, p.762; and W.R. Jones, p.50

Jelinger C. Symons was the Commissioner who visited Llanelly parish, where he took evidence from the Anglican curate, John Hughes, and the Anglican ironmaster, John Powell. Hughes said drunkenness was prevalent, and attributed the frequency of illicit intercourse on what the House of Lords termed the 'promiscuous and unrestrained admixture of the sexes in the mines'²⁹. Hughes felt that his parishioners were 'but slightly acquainted with the observances of civilised life'³⁰. They were narrow-minded, and, according to John Powell, their morals were defective regarding honesty and sobriety³¹. Hughes remarked that the better educated classes attended the parish church, and both he and Powell believed the Welsh language was a cause of ignorance amongst the local populace³². Crucially, Hughes estimated that no more than a third of the adult population could read, and less could write³³.

Symons visited three principal schools: Llanelly Church School, the Clydach Works School, and a Dissenting Day School at Brynmawr. The Llanelly Church School attracted some praise; the parish generally did not:

Taking into account the very inferior capacity of the children in this locality, I regard this as a very successful school, placed moreover in a district eminently in need of mental and spiritual enlightenment³⁴.

The master at the Church School spoke no Welsh, which was no bar to him communicating with his pupils, yet only a short distance away at the Clydach Works School, the situation was altogether different:

²⁹ Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, vol. 65, session 12th July - 12th August 1842, pp.106-114.

³⁰ Education Commission, Vol. XXVII, p.98

³¹ Ibid., p.124

³² It ought to be said that Hughes and Powell, in common with other witnesses, were responding to a questionnaire rather than volunteering information.

³³ Education Commission, Vol. XXVII, p.98

³⁴ Education Commission, Vol. XXVII, p.43

The children belong to the parents of different countries and characters, and the master understands no Welsh, and labours under great disadvantage in all these respects³⁵.

The Dissenting Day School at Brynmawr attracted the greatest criticism: 'The children corresponded with the room; they were dirty and disorderly to the last degree'. 'Their minds were perfect blanks', and 'The moment the master's back was turned, two or three couples began fighting and cuffing each other'³⁶.

The Clydach works school was conducted along the lines of the National Society, though not actually affiliated to any religious body³⁷. It represented the most serious attempt to provide an elementary education yet, employing two trained and relatively well paid teachers³⁸. The school had 242 children 'on its books', which presumably meant enrolled. Actual attendance was a different matter: 'The attendance is extremely irregular; the children are constantly taken off to the works and return after an interval for a short time, and then leave again'³⁹. Hughes, the Curate, added 'they will put the children to work at so early an age as to give them no chance of being permanently bettered by going to school'⁴⁰. This was a common occurrence, noted by Tremenheere, and commented upon by Professor I.G. Jones as an 'indisposition on the part of parents to look for education for their children and a wilful blindness to the benefits'⁴¹.

³⁵ Ibid., p.133

³⁶ Ibid. p.133

³⁷ Ibid., p. 133

³⁸ Husband and wife, Benjamin and Ann Matthews, had trained at a Bristol Diocesan School. They received £82 jointly, when many teachers in the district were paid under £15: Education Commission, Vol. XXVII, p. 30

³⁹ Ibid., p.133

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.98

⁴¹ I.G. Jones, p.116

Board Schools

By 1858, Llanelly parish had six permanent schools, including the Clydach works school, the National School at Gilwern, a school at Llanelly Hill run by a John Rosser, and schools run by William Scott (unusual, in that it was a day and boarding school) and William Williams. There was also a British School at Brynmawr. By 1869 there was a permanent school building at Darenfelen, on Llanelly Hill (on the site of the present day junior school). The Victorian ideal of self-help was also evident in the Clydach Reading Association, under the Secretaryship of a John F. Skirmshire.

A School Board had been set up in the parish in 1871, following the Education Act of the previous year. By 1887, Llanelly Hill had a Board School, attendance at which would have been made compulsory by the 1880 Education Act:

we have a Day School in the neighbourhood. A spacious building with 260 names on the register, (this was a step in the right direction, what was needed for many years before it was erected.) Known as the Daren Felen Board School, a branch of the Llanelly (Brecon) School Board, it is a mixed school being in a rural district with a very good staff of teachers⁴².

The introduction of the Board system had apparently brought considerable benefits: 'the result in this neighbourhood has been very satisfactory, almost every year since the school has been opened'⁴³.

The 1870 Education Act was to have far-reaching consequences, not least in the decline of the Welsh language (through its insistence that children should only speak English at school) and in wresting education from the realms of the Sunday School, where it had been the prerogative of mainly Welsh speaking chapels⁴⁴.

⁴² William Luther, *Llanelly Hill and its Antiquities*, (n. pub., 1887) p.9

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Hilda Jennings, *Brynmawr: a Study of a Distressed Area* (Allenson, 1934), p.123

Intermediate Education

The National and British Society Schools, the Board Schools, and other forms of day school, all provided an elementary education. Intermediate education was available, but was not taken up by children from mining districts. Intermediate education can broadly be termed as bridging the gap between elementary and university education. The Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889 provided Wales with a system of secondary schools, funded by rates (levied by the new County Councils) and Government grants - a system was later adopted in England. This legislation was the result of the Aberdare Committee⁴⁵.

The Aberdare Committee took evidence in Brecon, where proceedings were marked with religious bitterness. According to the professor at Brecon Congregational College (who admittedly may have had an axe to grind): 'The hostility of the clergy in Wales to dissent is implacable and they are determined by every means in their power to stamp it out'⁴⁶. Other witnesses complained that the endowed grammar schools exposed Nonconformist pupils to Anglican influences, and that they were too exclusive. Christ College, Brecon, established in the 1540s, was endowed by the Church of England, and of its 131 pupils, only 12 were Nonconformist⁴⁷. Pupils at local endowed grammar schools were at least 70% Church of England (and usually nearer 90%)⁴⁸.

The endowed grammar schools were grouped with proprietary and private schools, to form the providers of intermediate education in Breconshire. The pupils in these schools were: 'for the most part, the sons of clergymen, ministers, smaller professional men, farmers, tradesmen, and persons engaged in business. Among them were a few described as belonging to the working class'⁴⁹. In all, there were 10 such

⁴⁵ The Commission into Higher and Intermediate Education in Wales, known after its Chairman, H.A. Bruce, Lord Aberdare.

⁴⁶ Report of the above Commission, PP, 1881, XXXIII, Vol.II, Minutes of Evidence, p. xviii

⁴⁷ This figure of 12 Nonconformist pupils was questioned by a later witness.

⁴⁸ These included schools at Monmouth, Usk, and Abergavenny (partly endowed by Jesus College, Oxford, which had strong Welsh connections)

⁴⁹ Report into Higher Education, 1881, Vol.II, p.xvi

schools in Breconshire. The occupations and 'class of life' of the parents of children at these schools were professional, farming and trading. Only Cefn Coed grammar school at Vaynor mentioned mining as a parental occupation. The same picture emerged for schools in Monmouthshire⁵⁰. At Brecon, Thomas Butcher, the proprietor of the Middle Class School, said that he had some boys at his school from the iron and coal works at Merthyr Tydfil and Cefn, but they were the sons of farmers not colliers⁵¹. Interestingly, there seemed to be a consensus amongst witnesses to the Aberdare Committee that, if the children of miners were to attend school, they would be more interested in sciences due to the technical nature of mining.

Education on Llanelly Hill

Thomas Price founded his Welsh school at Gellyfelen in 1820, but it is not known how long this lasted. In mid-century, children from Llanelly Hill probably attended the Clydach works school in so far as they attended anywhere. Table 7.2 shows the population of Llanelly Hill under the age of 20, in 1851. There were 846 people in this age group, representing 46.43% of the total population. The male-female ratio was fairly evenly balanced, with 429 males to 417 females.

This section of the population has been divided into those at work, those at home, and those in school⁵². So, for example, there were 117 boys in the 0-4 age group, of whom 114 (or 97.43%) were at home, 1 (or 0.85%) was at work, and 2 (1.71%) were at school.

According to the census, school attendance was remarkably low, with only 6.53% of boys and 9.35% of girls attending school. Even between the ages of 5 and 9, when school attendance should have been at its highest, only 17.12% of boys and 20% of girls were at school. Four years earlier, the Education Commission reported that children did not attend school because they were sent to work at an early age. But the

⁵⁰ Ibid., appendix III

⁵¹ Ibid., p.688

⁵² Those with nothing recorded in the occupations column of the census were treated as being at home.

Table 7.2 - Population under 20, at home, work, and school Llanelly Hill, 1851 (percentages in brackets)

Status		0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	Total by status
At home	Male	114 (97.43)	84 (75.76)	38 (34.86)	3 (3.26)	239 (55.71)
	Female	117 (95.9)	95 (79.16)	59 (65.55)	29 (34.12)	300 (71.94)
At work	Male	1 (0.85)	8 (7.21)	64 (58.71)	89 (96.74)	162 (37.75)
	Female	0 (0)	1 (0.83)	23 (25.55)	54 (63.53)	78 (18.70)
At school	Male	2 (1.71)	19 (17.12)	7 (6.42)	0 (0)	28 (6.53)
	Female	5 (4.1)	24 (20.00)	8 (8.88)	2 (2.35)	39 (9.35)
TOTAL BY AGE GROUP	Male	117 (99.99)	111 (100)	109 (99.99)	92 (100)	429 (99.99)
	Female	122 (100)	120 (99.99)	90 (99.98)	85 (100)	417 (99.99)

Source: 1851 census, PRO (HO/107/2490)

census records that 55.71% of boys and 71.9% of girls were at home, with only 37.75% of boys and 18.70% of girls at work.

The census may be inaccurate in this regard. Certainly the number of scholars was probably under-recorded both nationally and on Llanelly Hill, partly through enumerators failing to understand and explain the schedules properly⁵³. If school attendance on Llanelly Hill is compared with areas chosen because of their low school attendance rates, then it seems increasingly likely that the true number of scholars was under-recorded on Llanelly Hill (table 7.3).

Table 7.3 - Percentage of population under 20 at school - Warwickshire, Birmingham, Coventry and Llanelly Hill compared, 1851

	Male	Female
Warwickshire	30.3	29.8
Birmingham	26.2	26.9
Coventry	30.1	28.0
Llanelly Hill	6.5	9.3

Source: 1851 census, PRO (HO/107/2490) and Coleman, 'The Incidence of Education in Mid-Century', in Wrigley (Ed.), *Nineteenth Century Society, etc.*, p.405

In his study of Bethnal Green in 1851, Coleman took a sample of every tenth household in the Hackney Road Registration District, meaning that, although the population of the District was 23,906, the sample size was fairly close to the size of population on Llanelly Hill⁵⁴. The Hackney Road district contained densely populated poor areas, and Bethnal Green was, at the time, a centre of the declining Spitalfields silk-weaving industry, though furniture workers and labourers also featured in the workforce.

Table 7.4 shows Coleman's data for Bethnal Green, plus the same information for Llanelly Hill. The pattern was the same for both places: low percentages of scholars in the 0-4 age range, a peak in the 5-9 age group, and a tailing off in the 10-14 age group, as children began work. But nowhere do the percentages of scholars on

⁵³ Coleman, p.402

⁵⁴ Coleman, p.407

Table 7.4 - Population under 20 at school and at work - Bethnal Green and Llanelly Hill compared, 1851 (percentages in brackets)

		Males				Females			
	Age group	At school	At work	At home	Total	At school	At work	At home	Total
Bethnal Green	0-4	8 (4.7)	Nil	159 (95.2)	167 (99.9)	17 (10.00)	Nil	153 (90.0)	170 (100.0)
	5-9	65 (50.4)	Nil	64 (49.6)	129 (100.0)	79 (50.6)	Nil	77 (49.36)	156 (99.96)
	10-14	37 (33.9)	36 (33.0)	36 (33.02)	109 (99.9)	21 (22.1)	20 (21.1)	54 (56.84)	95 (100.0)
Llanelly Hill	0-4	2 (1.7)	Nil	115 (98.3)	117 (100.0)	5 (4.1)	Nil	117 (95.9)	122 (100.0)
	5-9	19 (17.1)	Nil	92 (82.9)	111 (100.0)	24 (20.0)	Nil	96 (80.0)	120 (100.0)
	10-14	7 (6.4)	64 (58.7)	38 (34.9)	109 (100.0)	8 (8.9)	23 (25.5)	59 (65.55)	90 (99.95)

Source: 1851 census, PRO (HO 107/2490) and Coleman, 'The Incidence of Education in Mid-Century', in Wrigley (Ed.), *Nineteenth Century Society, etc.*, p.408

Llanelly Hill begin to approach those of Bethnal Green. In the 5-9 age group, roughly 50% of Bethnal Green males and 50% of females attended school. On Llanelly Hill, in the same age group, only 17% of males and 20% of females were at school.

In terms of the percentages in employment, there were almost twice as many boys employed in the 10-14 age group on Llanelly Hill than there were in Bethnal Green. For females at work, however, the proportions were remarkably similar. This probably reflects the demand of the mining industry for young male labour on Llanelly Hill, the lack of opportunities for young males in Bethnal Green due to the decline of the silk weaving industry, and the lack of suitable alternative employment for young female labour in both places.

The greater presence of young women in the home reflected the observation by the Children's Employment Commissioner for South Wales that girls usually started work later than boys, but were expected to help their mothers rather than attending school⁵⁵. Across Wales in general there were more male than female scholars (56,988 males to 45,233 females in 1851)⁵⁶ but that was reversed on Llanelly Hill, probably again due to the demands of the mining industry for young male labour.

In view of these apparent problems with the census data for Llanelly Hill, it is difficult to draw specific conclusions. School attendances were likely to have been low, though probably not as low as suggested by the census. The census data for 1851 is shown in diagrammatic form in figs. 7.1(a) and 7.1(b).

⁵⁵ Report of Commission on Employment of Children, PP, 1842, Vol. XVI.

⁵⁶ Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, vol. 2, p.212

Fig 7.1(a) - Male population under 20, at work, home, school, Llanelly Hill 1851

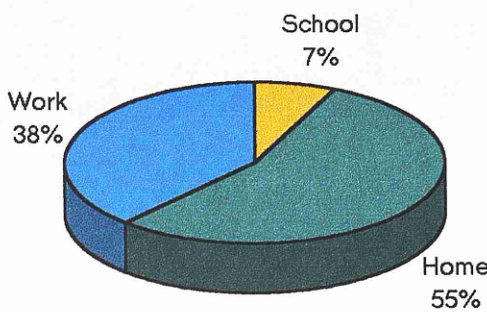
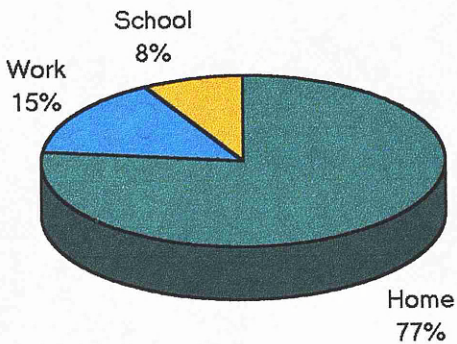


Fig 7.1(b) - Female population under 20, at work, home, school, Llanelly Hill 1851



The number of scholars was probably also under-recorded at the 1891 census. Table 7.5 shows that, in the 0-9 age group, the percentage of children at home was little different to 1851 (87% for girls and around 86% for boys). A 3.95% drop in the number of boys of this age at work was probably correct in principle because the minimum age for underground workers was by now 12.

Table 7.5 - Population under 20, at home, work, and school, Llanelly Hill, 1891 (percentages in brackets)

Status		0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	Total by status
At home	Male	93 (100)	62 (70.45)	24 (34.28)	0 (0)	179 (56.30)
	Female	73 (96.05)	61 (79.22)	40 (70.17)	38 (77.55)	212 (81.84)
At work	Male	0 (0)	0 (0)	35 (50)	67 (100)	102 (32.07)
	Female	0 (0)	0 (0)	5 (8.77)	11 (22.49)	16 (6.18)
At school	Male	0 (0)	26 (29.54)	11 (15.71)	0 (0)	37 (11.64)
	Female	3 (3.95)	16 (20.78)	12 (21.05)	0 (0)	31 (11.97)
Total by age group	Male	93 (100)	88 (99.99)	70 (99.99)	67 (100)	318 (100.01)
	Female	76 (100)	77 (100)	57 (99.99)	49 (100.04)	259 (99.99)

Source: 1891 census, PRO (RG/12/4576)

In the 10-19 age group, there was a 29% decrease in the number of girls at work, reflecting the exclusion of women from the mining workforce. However, this 29% chose to stay at home (a 23% rise over 1851) rather than attend school (a 6% rise over 1851). There was a 3% decrease in boys at home, and a 2% decrease in boys at work, coinciding with a 5% increase in boys attending school.

Overall, 73% of girls remained at home in 1891, whilst 11.32% attended school; for boys the figures were: 74.45% at work, 17.5% at home, and 8.03% at school. There must be doubt about the low school attendances, since by 1891 elementary education was compulsory. Local newspaper reports record a steady trickle of parents passing through the police court at Brynmawr in the 1890s, charged with failing to send their children to school, but this did not amount to non-attendance on the scale suggested by the census. It was unlikely, in the age of Board Schools and School Inspectors, that such a sizeable majority of children did not attend school.

Other evidence tends to confirm that the census under-recorded the number of scholars. The 1891 census gave only 68 children as being at school, yet in 1887 there were said to be 260 children on the register at Darenfelen Board School⁵⁷, and in 1901 the Board School had room for 300 children with 245 actually in attendance⁵⁸.

The 1891 census statistics are shown in diagrammatic form in figs. 7.2(a) and 7.2(b).

⁵⁷ Luther, p.8

⁵⁸ Kelly's Directory for 1901

Fig 7.2(a) - Male population under 20, at work, home, school,
Llanelly Hill 1891

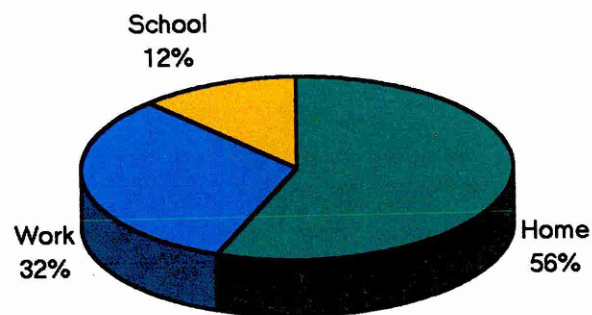
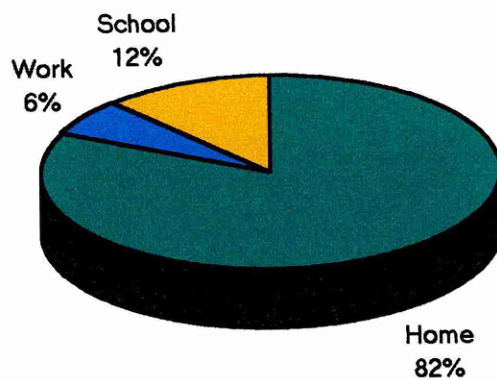


Fig 7.2(b) - Female population under 20, at work, home, school,
Llanelly Hill 1891



Chapter 8

Language

The Status and Decline of Welsh

The subject of education had considerable bearing on language, most notably where it was insisted that the medium of instruction be English. The main source for the study of language is the 1891 census, which, for Wales, recorded whether a person spoke English, Welsh, or both. This information was recorded for all persons over the age of 3. Other than this, language can be studied through a variety of sources, many of which are qualitative rather than quantitative.

The most distinctive linguistic feature of Wales in the eighteenth century, for the purposes of the present study, was a bilingual zone along the border with England, which was steadily encroaching westwards, into a monolingual Welsh heartland. Within this zone, the use of the two languages differed considerably from place to place.

P.J. Morgan and D. Thomas write that Welsh survived strongly into the eighteenth century, and that the language of church services is the best indication of the state of the language prior to the 1891 census¹. W.T.R. Pryce has used the visitation returns of the Established Church to map the linguistic geography of Wales in an era before reliable census data became available². These returns, filed by clergy for the purposes of Bishops' visitations, show the following patterns of language use in selected Welsh counties. (That the figures do not add up to 100% is due to other, minor categories of language use not being shown here).

¹ P.J. Morgan and D. Thomas, *Wales: the Shaping of a Nation*, (David & Charles, 1984) p.46-7.

² See for instance W.T.R. Pryce, 'Approaches to the Linguistic Geography of Northeast Wales, 1750-1846', *The National Library of Wales Journal*, XVII, (1972), 343-63

Table 8.1 - Main language consistently used in the Established Church, selected Welsh counties c.1750-c.1820

	No. of places of worship	% Welsh	% English
Anglesey	76	93	0
Breconshire	80	58	6
Caernarfonshire	71	86	1
Glamorgan	128	29	23
Monmouthshire	128	9	45
Radnorshire	48	4	83

Source: E. R. White, 'The Established Church, Dissent and the Welsh Language c.1660-1811', Appendix 3, in *The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution*, ed. by Geraint H. Jenkins, (University of Wales Press, 1997)

Table 8.1 shows the predominance of Welsh in the North Wales counties of Anglesey and Caernarfon, the encroachment of English in the heavily industrialised South Wales counties of Glamorgan and Monmouth, and the ambivalent position of border counties in the bilingual zone, with English being exceptionally strong in Radnorshire, but still being fairly weak in the neighbouring county of Breconshire. Between 1755 and 1828 only two Radnorshire parishes consistently used Welsh as the main language of service. During roughly the same period, the Welsh language retreated slightly in east Breconshire, but was fortified in the remainder of the county, which bordered on the strongly Welsh-speaking counties of Cardigan and Carmarthen³. In Monmouthshire, the eastern parishes used English for religious service by the mid-eighteenth century, and English was also used as the language of religion in the towns, including Newport, Usk, and Abergavenny. Abergavenny held only monthly Welsh services in 1763, but had abandoned even these by 1771⁴.

The local effect of this bilingual zone was described by the Revd. Henry Thomas Payne, writing of Breconshire between 1801 and 1811: 'the language is very generally Welsh, among the lower orders, but from their situation immediately upon

³ Eryn M. White, 'The Established Church, Dissent and the Welsh Language c.1660-1811', in *The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution*, ed. by Geraint H. Jenkins, (University of Wales Press, 1997), p.255

⁴ Ibid.

the English borders, it is much adulterated, abounding with English words in a Welsh form'⁵.

Morgan and Thomas recognise that, increasingly in the nineteenth century, the English speaking upper strata of society attended the Established Church, whilst the Welsh speaking population were largely Nonconformist. The evidence of the Education Commission of 1847 makes plain that this was the case with religious attendance in Llanelly parish. Nevertheless, the parish church held alternate services in Welsh and English each Sunday, albeit the Welsh services were relatively thinly attended because most Welsh speakers attended chapel.

Charity sometimes played a role in maintaining the use of Welsh. In a perhaps far-sighted gesture, Edward Lewis of the Neuadd Farm, just beneath Llanelly parish church, bequeathed a rent charge of £3 per annum in 1713 for the preaching of six sermons in Welsh each year, other than by the incumbent⁶. This charity was still in existence in the mid-nineteenth century, when there remained an extensive Welsh speaking population in the parish. More important than this isolated gesture were the Charity schools, which played a particularly important role in fostering the use of Welsh. Griffith Jones's Circulating Schools, which were of such importance in Wales in the period 1738-77, taught through the medium of Welsh except in those areas where the language was not generally spoken. Thus, there were a large number of English medium schools held in Monmouthshire in this period, including the towns of Usk and Abergavenny, though there were none in Breconshire⁷. The eight Circulating Schools held in Llanelly parish between 1756 and 1777 must thus have used Welsh. These schools made many of the Welsh population literate in their own language, and this has been contrasted with the work of other charitable societies in Scotland, Ireland and the Isle of Man, where English was insisted upon. The SSPCK (the

⁵ Revd. Henry Thomas Payne, material collected towards a history of Brecknock, (NLW, Minor Deposits, 187A).

⁶ Samuel Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary of Wales*, Vol.2, 3rd Ed., (S. Lewis, 1848), p.10

⁷ Eryn M. White, 'Popular Schooling and the Welsh Language 1650-1800', in *The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution*, pp.327, 329

Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge) actually aimed to eradicate the Gaelic language⁸. It should be noted that the SPCK (the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge) had been active in Wales between 1699-1737, and had used English as the medium of instruction, though it provided religious literature in Welsh.

One feature which helped preserve the Welsh language was the isolation of so much of the Principality, due to its mountainous nature, and lack of communication networks. Industrialisation in the nineteenth century, and the coming of the railways, opened the country out to external influences, which hastened the language's decline. It was an irony that, as the population of Wales increased there were more Welsh speakers than ever before, but the proportion of the population that spoke Welsh was in decline, particularly towards the end of the century, when English in-migration began to take place on a larger scale. Hence, the number of Welsh speakers (monoglot and bilingual) rose from 929,824 in 1901 to 977,366 in 1911, but the percentage of the population able to speak Welsh fell between those years from 49.9 to 43.5⁹.

The process of encroachment in the border zone was succinctly described by Pryce in relation to Breconshire, which displayed the 'classic stages of language change ... Welsh in 1801, bilingual in 1851 and substantially Anglicised by 1881'¹⁰. Thus the percentage of the population of Breconshire who were able to speak Welsh declined from 45% in 1901, to 41% in 1911. If the same six counties are examined as previously, those in the Welsh heartland showed decline, but retained by far the highest percentages of Welsh speakers. There were considerable differences between the two border counties, and the two industrialised counties of the south, though the proportion of Welsh speakers had declined in all.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 339-40

⁹ John Aitchison and Harold Carter, *A Geography of the Welsh Language 1961-1991*, (University of Wales Press, 1994), pp. 34, 41

¹⁰ W.T.R. Pryce, 'Wales as a Culture Region: Patterns of Change 1750-1971', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 229-61, quoted in Aitchison & Carter, p.37.

Table 8.2 - Percentage of population able to speak Welsh, selected Welsh counties, 1901 and 1911

	1901	1911
Anglesey	91.7	88.7
Breconshire	45.9	41.5
Caernarfonshire	89.6	85.6
Glamorgan	43.5	38.1
Monmouthshire	13.0	9.6
Radnorshire	6.2	5.4

Source: Aitchison & Carter, *A Geography of the Welsh Language 1961-1991*, (University of Wales Press, 1994), p.41

Even at an earlier stage in the nineteenth century, Welsh had been weak in Monmouthshire and Radnorshire. In the intervening period, Radnorshire had lost population, whilst Monmouthshire, now extensively industrialised, had borne the brunt of English in-migration. Glamorgan too, was industrialised, but Welsh had been stronger there at the earlier period, and much subsequent migration to the county had been of Welsh speaking people from west Wales (the effect of which is discussed more fully below). The decline of Welsh in Breconshire was not as dramatic as it might have been, as, although the bilingual zone exerted pressure westwards, the bulk of the county had not undergone industrialisation, and there remained the Welsh-oriented uplands, and the influence of the Welsh speaking counties to the west.

Language in Llanelly parish

Llanelly parish lay in the bilingual border zone. The nearby town of Abergavenny was anglicised, being an important market town with a regular movement of travellers on the London to west Wales coach route. The Usk Valley, too, was an anglicising influence, as seen in the spread of early Dissenting sects from England. From the late eighteenth century, the South Wales iron belt, including Llanelly parish, attracted in-migration of skilled English labour, especially from the ironworks of the English Midlands. There were migrants from Staffordshire in Llanelly parish at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and – most importantly from the point of view of language –

there was a purely English speaking Sunday School at Clydach by 1807¹¹. The 1851 census revealed English in-migrants on Llanelly Hill. From the early 1860s the railway network opened up the area further, with the Merthyr to Abergavenny line passing through the parish at Llanelly Hill. But in-migration from England increased towards the end of the century. Before that time it had mostly been exceeded by migration from Welsh speaking parts of Wales. Ieuan Gwynedd Jones believes that the process of anglicisation in the border areas had been reversed by the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, and that 'the consequences of industrialisation were 'cymricization'; that is, the industrial valleys became predominantly Welsh'¹². This was a theory most famously advanced by Brinley Thomas¹³. The demographic movement associated with industrialisation meant, for the first time, there were large concentrations of Welsh speaking people gathered in one place. Previously, the settlement pattern of much of Wales, especially in the Welsh speaking upland areas, had been one of thinly scattered remote homesteads.

Professor Jones points to the popularity of local *eisteddfodau* and the growth of literary societies, both of which operated in the medium of Welsh. The nineteenth century local eisteddfodau were a platform for working class cultural endeavour, and had an altogether different flavour to the modern day National Eisteddfodau¹⁴. Literary clergymen took the lead on the local eisteddfod platform, and the literary clergyman *par excellence* was Thomas Price, the one time curate of Llanelly parish. Price, who went by the bardic name of *Carnhuanawc*, won eisteddfod prizes at Welshpool (1824), Liverpool (1840), and Abergavenny (1845 and 1848). His interest in education and the Welsh language at a national level has already been referred to.

¹¹ W.E. Minchinton, 'The Place of Brecknock in the Industrialisation of South Wales', *Brycheiniog*, VII, 1961, p.41

¹² I.G. Jones, *The Valleys in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, (text of a lecture to the Standing Conference on the History of the South Wales Valleys, 1981), p.22

¹³ Brinley Thomas, 'A Cauldron, A Rebirth: Population and the Welsh Language in the Nineteenth Century', *Welsh History Review*, 13, 418-37

¹⁴ I.G. Jones, *Mid-Victorian Wales, the Observers and the Observed*, (University of Wales Press, 1992), p.18

Abergavenny became something of a centre for a Welsh cultural renaissance. In 1833, the Abergavenny Cymreigyddion Society (*Cymreigyddion y Fenni*) was formed at the Sun Public House (today the Coach & Horses) to preserve and promote the Welsh language. It was this society that organised the Abergavenny eisteddfodau, which were popular enough to attract competitors from Brittany (the Breton language was closely related to Welsh) and Germany, and the attendance of dignitaries like the French Ambassador. Its membership certificate had an antiquarian flavour, depicting the bardic alphabet and the picture of a druid beneath an oak. The society disbanded in 1854¹⁵. The Breton connection probably came about through Thomas Price, who was 'largely responsible for making the Welsh and the Bretons aware of their ancient kinship'¹⁶. As well as playing central roles in both the Cymreigyddion Society and the Abergavenny Eisteddfodau, Price was a frequent visitor to Brittany and had assisted in the translation of the Bible into Breton. There was a link, too, with the Clydach Ironworks: the Secretary of the Cymreigyddion Society between 1833 and 1839 was Thomas Bevan, (*Caradawc y Fenni*), a prize winner at the 1835 Abergavenny Eisteddfod, who for seven years was employed at the Clydach company shop¹⁷.

The success of the Abergavenny eisteddfodau also had much to do with the patronage of Lady Llanover, who had pioneered the notion of a Welsh national costume for women, and who had herself won an essay prize at the 1834 Cardiff eisteddfod. (Morgan and Thomas go so far as to state that the Abergavenny eisteddfodau of this period boosted the Welsh tweed industry¹⁸).

The activities of the *Cymreigyddion* society and the Abergavenny *eisteddfodau* show a concern for the Welsh language, and a conscious effort to preserve or promote it. But these were probably the efforts of a middle-class section of local society.

¹⁵ For *Cymreigyddion y Fenni*, see Frank Olding in the Journal of the Gwent Local History Council, No.61, 1986

¹⁶ Dictionary of Welsh Biography, entry for Thomas Price, p.791

¹⁷ Thomas Bevan, 1802-82, antiquary, won an essay prize at the Abergavenny Eisteddfod in 1835, for an essay on the history of Gwent under Roman rule: Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940 (Hon. Society of Cymmrodorion, 1959)

¹⁸ Morgan & Thomas, p.202

Abergavenny was a town where English had for long been the principle language, and it was amongst the educated middle-classes that Welsh had most been displaced by English. There is no evidence as to how far, if at all, the population of Llanelly parish participated in the cultural events of the *eisteddfodau*, but then the Welsh language was in a far less perilous position amongst the industrial communities, where, at this stage, it was probably more widely spoken than English.

Professor Jones has written that the movement from rural to industrial areas was a 'largely internal migration of Welsh speaking Welshmen'¹⁹. Evidence of nicknames at the Clydach Ironworks goes someway to supporting this, with their emphasis on placenames as a means of identity rather than the small stock of Welsh surnames: Twm Pentwyn, Shoni Pantmawr, Bettws Shan, and so forth²⁰. Jones also points out that Welsh migrants from anglicised areas could readily be reabsorbed into Welsh culture and language (they would probably have been bilingual rather than monoglot English speakers)²¹. There is also the evidence provided by institutions. In 1847, children at the Clydach works' school had difficulty understanding a teacher who could not speak Welsh²².

P.N. Jones has used the language of Baptist chapels in Monmouth and Glamorgan to trace the rolling back westwards of the Welsh language²³. The Baptist denomination was chosen because it was popular amongst English and Welsh speaking sections of the population, and because it was more flexible and hence more adaptable to the pressures of English speaking Baptists. Even so, chapels were often the last stronghold of the Welsh language, and there was a time lag between the decline of Welsh and a chapel abandoning that language for English. Jones divides his

¹⁹ I.G. Jones, 'Language and Community in Nineteenth Century Wales', in David Smith (Ed.), *A People and a Proletariat: Essays in the History of Wales, 1780-1980*, (Pluto Press, 1980) p.49

²⁰ Thomas Jordan, *My Reminiscences of the Old Clydach Ironworks*, 1909. Jordan was referring to a period before 1840.

²¹ I.G. Jones, 'Language and Community', p.49

²² Report of Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales, PP, 1847, XXVII, Part II, Breconshire.

²³ P.N. Jones, 'Baptist Chapels as an index of cultural transition in the South Wales coalfield before 1914, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 2, 4 (1976), 347-360

study into three phases: pre 1860 (the localised iron industry); 1860-89 (exploitation of the steam coal valleys in Glamorgan); and 1890-1914 (the coalboom throughout the coalfield, including the western anthracite section and the central and lower Monmouthshire valleys). By examining the language used by Baptist chapels Jones concludes that Welsh was dominant right to the eastern margin of the coalfield in the first phase, with towns such as Tredegar and Nantyglo having no English chapels, although there were English chapels in the Eastern or Afon Llwyd Valley, below Blaenavon. This dominance was broken in the second phase, when English and Welsh chapel construction went in tandem, and English chapels were particularly numerous in the Afon Llwyd Valley. In the third phase Welsh chapels were congregated in the western coalfield, with chapels in the more central and eastern valleys emphatically English. Most chapels to 1871 were Welsh, though instances of complete linguistic transition from Welsh to English had taken place in most of the irontowns, except Blaenavon. A process of anglicisation then took place, so that by 1891, Ebbw Vale had only one Welsh-only chapel, and by 1911 the transition was complete, with only Beaufort and Brynmawr retaining bilingual chapels. (The transition from Welsh to English speaking was usually via a bilingual interim).

During the first phase cited by Jones, English speaking Baptists built Nazareth chapel at Penrhiw in Llanelly parish (just below Coed Cae Newydd on Llanelly Hill). From this, we must presuppose that other Baptist chapels in the parish (Beersheba and Bethlehem) were Welsh speaking. Similarly, the records of Bethlehem Baptist chapel, Maesygartha, were in Welsh until 1860. During the second phase, Hope Baptist chapel at Gilwern was built in 1876, again to cater for English speaking Baptists. Hope chapel originated in 1860 with a Gilwern shoemaker, John Powell, beginning a school in the Factory House at Danybont. Of the other denominations, the longstanding Siloam Independent chapel at Clydach (1829) maintained services in Welsh until 1879. Presumably this policy also prevailed at Siloam's schoolroom on Llanelly Hill. The pattern in Llanelly parish was thus that Welsh had the upper hand as the dominant language of the chapels, but by the close of the 1870s, the tide had

turned. Likewise, Welsh was the usual language in commercial circles in Brynmawr until around 1870²⁴. This accords with the phases studied by Jones. The third phase, saw the eradication of Welsh speaking chapels, although there were instances of the residual 'fastness' mentioned by Jones, as for instance Bethesda Congregational chapel in Brynmawr which conducted its services solely in Welsh until as late as 1918, whilst services in Welsh survived at Libanus chapel, Brynmawr, until the 1930s²⁵.

The 1870s were a highly significant decade in the retreat of the Welsh language. An important factor was the Education Act of 1870, which insisted on the use of English as the medium of instruction. Schoolchildren were actively discouraged from using Welsh in the classroom, being punished by the 'Welsh Not' when caught doing so²⁶. Llanelly Hill had a Board School from about 1871. However, the Welsh language would have deteriorated anyway, with the big influx of English speakers to Brynmawr and its environs, and the opening up of the area by the railway system.

Language on Llanelly Hill

In 1820, Thomas Price had established his Welsh speaking school at Gellyfelen on Llanelly Hill. Over forty years later, children at the Clydach works school, who probably included children from Llanelly Hill, had difficulties following a teacher who spoke no Welsh. Yet, by 1887, William Luther, stated of Llanelly Hill that 'the offspring have lost a considerable portion of the native tongue'²⁷. The 1891 census reveals numerous families where the parents were bilingual but the children spoke only English. Clearly, in such households, English would prevail, and this is confirmed by Luther:

²⁴ H. Jennings, *Brynmawr: a Study of a Distressed Area*, (Allenson, 1934), p.100

²⁵ Malcolm Thomas, *Brynmawr, Beaufort and Blaina in Photographs*, (Old Bakehouse Publications, 1994) p.55

²⁶ By a board being hung around the child's neck.

²⁷ William Luther, *Llanelly Hill and its Antiquities*, (n. pub., 1887), p.1

Among the younger people of both sex, the English language is spoken, with an exceptional case. The middle age and the old inhabitants have a good Welsh tongue ... and when the aged men and women are obliged to speak English it sounds peculiar with such a deep Welsh accent and Welsh pronunciations²⁸.

Linguistic status therefore depended on age - not unnaturally - with young persons speaking only English (though William Luther says they understood Welsh, but just neglected to speak it) middle aged persons being bilingual, and elderly persons finding it easier to converse in Welsh than English. Obviously these are broad gradations, but they help to illustrate the uneven spread of a language in decline.

At the time of the 1891 census, the population of Wales (over the age of 3) was 1,685,614, of whom 508,036 were Welsh speaking, 402,253 spoke English and Welsh, thus giving a total of 910,289 Welsh speakers²⁹. Some 54% of the Welsh population were thus able to speak Welsh in 1891. This is the usual figure quoted by historians and includes monoglot Welsh and bilinguals. Llanelly Hill in 1891 had a population of 1,132. Of these, 119 spoke only Welsh, 326 were bilingual, and 659 spoke only English (28 filed no returns). Some 40% were therefore able to speak Welsh, which was 14% below the national figure, reflecting the influence of anglicisation at the easternmost end of the coalfield.

The statistics for Llanelly Hill in 1891 can be compared with other Welsh communities. Table 8.3 shows the linguistic characteristics of the populations of Breconshire, Monmouthshire, Llanelly Hill, and the County Boroughs of Merthyr Tydfil and Newport. These are ranked left to right according to the ability to speak Welsh (monoglot and bilingual). Breconshire was a border county. Much of it consisted of rural uplands, which would increase the proportion of Welsh speakers, but this was partly offset by English cultural inroads made through the Usk Valley and

²⁸ Ibid., p.2

²⁹ Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, vol.1, p.78

infringements at the eastern edge of the county. Merthyr had seen an influx of workers from Welsh speaking areas of west Wales, and had a large concentration of Welsh speakers. Monmouthshire was a highly anglicised county, and had formed part of England for certain administrative purposes since the Acts of Union, 1536-43. Newport was inevitably subject to strong English influence, being close to the border and an important sea-port. (Many migrants from Somerset crossed the Bristol Channel, landing at Newport, before travelling north to the Monmouthshire coalfield). As one of the main coal exporting ports, Newport was also cosmopolitan.

Table 8.3 - Use of language: Llanelly Hill, Newport, Merthyr Tydfil, Breconshire and Monmouthshire, compared, 1891

Language	Merthyr Tydfil	Llanelly Hill	Brecons.	Mon.	Newport
Welsh speaking	35,244	119	5,228	9,816	2,240
English and Welsh speaking	39,812	326	13,699	29,743	8,164
Total Welsh speaking	75,056	445	18,927	39,559	10,404
Total population aged over 3	110,569	1023	50,335	260,033	91,222
Total Welsh speakers as % of total population over 3	67.88	43.50	37.60	15.21	11.40

Source: 1891 census, PRO (RG/12/4576), and Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, Vol.1, pp.78, 81, 83, 84. [Merthyr and Newport = County Boroughs of]

Some 68% of the population of the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil were able to speak Welsh, compared with only 11.4% in the County Borough of Newport, which was only twenty miles away. The Welsh language was also weak across the county of Monmouthshire, with only 15.2% able to speak Welsh. By comparison, less than half the population of Llanelly Hill (43.5%) could speak Welsh, though this was slightly higher than the figure for Breconshire (37.6%). The difference was probably accounted for by an earlier in-migration of Welsh speakers to Llanelly Hill, and a tendency for Welsh to survive longest in the industrial communities rather than the rural areas.

The distribution of those who spoke Welsh was uneven. The evidence to the Royal Commission on Land in Wales (1894) suggested that, if a line were drawn between Abergavenny and Newport, then that part of Monmouthshire to the west of such a line corresponded with the Welsh speaking area of the county³⁰. John Watkins, a farmer just outside Abergavenny, said that Welsh commenced on the eastern side of Breconshire, just on its borders with Monmouthshire³¹. These accounts show the weakening stature of Welsh the further east one travelled. But by either account, Llanelly Hill fell in a Welsh speaking area, though only narrowly so.

The distribution of language also depended on the nature of the community. A dense industrial concentration such as Merthyr tended to foster the Welsh language, despite some English in-migration. So, too, in Monmouthshire it was said to be the colliery districts that had 'principally kept up the Welsh language'³². In contrast, all the Duke of Beaufort's agricultural tenants on his Monmouthshire estate spoke English. At Abergavenny, there was only 1 farmer near John Watkins who spoke Welsh.

In his study of Bala, Ernest Sandberg classifies households according to a linguistic typology, which utilises seven criteria for inferring the linguistic status of a household³³. These criteria are then used to classify a household as mainly Welsh speaking, mainly English speaking, or bilingual.

The Welsh language was in a far stronger position in Bala in 1891 than on Llanelly Hill. Bala was in the Welsh cultural stronghold of the north west, and in terms of migration was a sending community rather than a receiving one. Its population never exceeded 1,700 (Llanelly Hill's population had declined from some 1,800 in 1851 to 1,100 in 1891).

³⁰ Evidence of Major E. Lister, Land Agent to Duke of Beaufort, *Royal Commission on Land in Wales and Monmouthshire*, PP, 1894, XXXVII, Minutes of Evidence, Vol.II, p.766

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.781

³² *Ibid.*

³³ See Ernest Sandberg, *Bala and Penllyn: the Demographic and Socio-Economic Structures of an Embryonic Welsh Town in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century*, (unpublished M.Phil Thesis, Open University, 1995), p.339 et seq.

In 1891, the languages spoken by individuals in the two communities compared as follows (figures are percentages of the respective populations):

	Llanelly Hill	Bala
English	58.21	6.5
Both	28.80	27.7
Welsh	10.51	62.3
Not stated	2.47	3.5

Each community had a similar percentage of bilingual speakers, but the difference lay in their proportions of monoglot speakers. The point again needs to be made, that bilingual speakers would most often speak the language of the monoglot majority - that is, Welsh in Bala, and English on Llanelly Hill - so that, for example, in households where bilingual parents had monoglot English speaking children (a common occurrence on Llanelly Hill in 1891) then the usual language of that household would inevitably be English, and indeed, such households fall into Sandberg's category of mainly English speaking.

If we now consider households, rather than individuals, and compare Bala and Llanelly Hill on that basis, the figures, as percentages of the total number of households, are as follows:

	Llanelly Hill	Bala
Mainly Welsh speaking	9.43	75.5
Mainly English speaking	62.29	7.0
Bilingual	25.82	17.6
Not stated	2.46	-- --

There was a great imbalance in the two communities between the percentages of households that spoke mainly Welsh and households that spoke mainly English. That

balance was heavily in favour of mainly English speaking households on Llanelly Hill, but was the reverse in Bala. Secondly, it needs to be noted that the percentage of English speaking *individuals* on Llanelly Hill was 58.21, whereas the percentage of mainly English speaking *households* was 62.29, which is precisely the point made above, that bilingualism would be weighted towards the language of the monoglot majority. Conversely, there was a slight drop from 10.51 to 9.43 between Welsh speaking individuals and mainly Welsh speaking households. This was again caused by the natural bias of bilinguals to speak English, simply because there were far more monoglot English than monoglot Welsh speakers.

The opposite was the case in Bala, where the percentage of mainly Welsh speaking households was 75.5, and the proportion of Welsh speaking individuals 62.3. This is the same effect described above, but in reverse, because in Bala the majority monoglot language was Welsh.

One final point that needs to be made is that three of the twenty three households on Llanelly Hill which were mainly Welsh speaking were in fact elderly widows living alone, who were monoglot Welsh speakers. This was symptomatic of the decline of a language whose use was confined mainly to the elderly. In a sense the language would die with them. By 1891 there were six times as many English as Welsh monoglots on Llanelly Hill. Only around 40% were able to speak the Welsh language, either alone or in conjunction with English. The crucial question was which language that 40% chose to use, and the evidence suggests this was more often English.

Chapter 9

Politics and Protest

Open or Closed Settlements?

In *Lord and Peasant in Nineteenth Century Britain*, D.R. Mills discusses 'closed' and 'open' villages, both in a rural and industrial context. The closed village was one controlled by the local landowner, who was usually also the main local employer. The closed village had few public houses or independent craftsmen, and its population was fairly static. The Established Church tended to predominate, and there were few, if any, Nonconformist chapels. The open village, on the other hand, was not subject to the control of a single landowner, and its population was more mobile. Open villages were characterised by the presence of Nonconformist chapels, public houses, and independent trades and craftspeople. The difference between the two types was one of paternalistic control or, to borrow from Mills, the contrast between benevolence and independence.

The closed industrial village was often established in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by industrialists who needed to provide housing for their workers. Many such villages were situated in isolated places near to raw materials, like lead mining communities in the Pennines where mining companies insisted on compulsory education and strict control of the number of public houses. There was a greater freedom of expression in these villages than was permitted in the rural closed village, and industrial settlements are perhaps best viewed as something of a hybrid, combining features of the open and closed types¹.

The iron producing and mining settlements of South Wales share certain features with the closed industrial village, in that they were sited in remote spots close to raw materials. Authority vested in the autocratic characters of ironmasters such as

¹ Dennis. R. Mills, *Lord and Peasant in Nineteenth Century Britain*, (Croom Helm, 1980) p.213

Richard Crawshay at Cyfarthfa, and the Bailey family at Nantyglo. Crawshay Bailey's residence at Brynmawr (called simply Ty Mawr, or the Big House) 'represented almost a feudal power over the neighbourhood'². The ironmaster was the equivalent of the rural squire. Jennings goes as far as to say that George Frere's reminiscences of the workmen at Clydach 'might well have come from a village squire attached ... to the people of his estate'³. Their power was potentially complete, since they could control employment, housing, and the wherewithal of life itself through the company shop. Many were magistrates, though by convention they did not try their own employees. Many were involved in local administration and some entered Parliament⁴.

In reality, the ironmasters' power was not absolute. A rural landowner could exercise tight control over a small static population where bonds of deference and paternalism had been established for generations. This was not the case with the constantly changing populations of the ironbelt, where many ironmasters were not the ultimate owners of the land they occupied (though others became substantial landowners in time) and where much of the day-to-day operation of an ironworks was left in the hands of agents. The scarcity of skilled labour also meant that craftsmen had a certain influence, not only with their employers – who were reluctant to lose them – but also over other workmen⁵. The butty system further weakened an ironmaster's direct control over his workforce, so much so that South Wales ironmasters lobbied for the passing of the 'Colliers Act' of 1800, which sought to criminalise certain working practices, and exert closer control over the jobbing miner⁶. The Clydach and Beaufort ironmaster Edward Kendall was prominent in

² Jennings, p.31

³ Hilda Jennings, *Brynmawr: a Study of a Distressed Area* (Allenson, 1934), p.30. George Frere's reminiscences were set out in a letter of 28th January, 1878, to the Revd. Arthur Griffiths, reproduced in Griffiths's *Annals and Reminiscences*, p.9.

⁴ The Clydach ironmasters Edward Kendall, John Powell, and John Jayne were all High Sheriffs of Breconshire. (Lords Liutenancies were usually reserved for the old aristocracy). Joseph and Crawshay Bailey became MPs, and Joseph Bailey became Lord Glanusk.

⁵ See: Chris Evans, *The Labyrinth of Flames*, (University of Wales Press, 1993), Chapter V

⁶ Evans, pp. 105-107

lobbying the House of Lords for this bill⁷. Legislation progressively undermined the ironmasters' power, or at least gave their workforce certain guarantees, such as the abolition of truck in the 1830s, and the increasing regulation by law of working terms and conditions. From the 1860s and 70s, the personal authority of the ironmaster was gradually sold out to anonymous corporate bodies under the new limited liability acts. In Llanelly parish, the personalities of the Freres and Powells were replaced by the New Clydach Sheet and Bar Iron Company, and the Brynmawr Coal and Iron Company, and at Nantyglo the Baileys sold to a limited liability company in 1870.

A Dangerous and Degraded Population?

This was a term used to describe the townsfolk of Brynmawr by the Education Commission of 1847. Elsewhere they referred to them as a 'violent and vicious community'⁸. In mid-century the town had an unenviable reputation for drunken brawling⁹, though it was not the only community given over to violence: at least one street fight in Blaenavon led to a fatality. In Llanelly parish, it was said that 'drinking bouts mostly ended in a fight'¹⁰. The Commission also took evidence that 'drunkenness is prevalent' in the parish, and that its populace was 'defective regarding honesty and sobriety'¹¹.

There were few recreational facilities in the early iron working communities except public houses. Problems of drunkenness and associated violence were exacerbated by the preponderance of young males earning relatively high wages. In 1844, there were a total of 68 publicans and beer retailers in Llanelly parish, including 27 public houses (16 in Brynmawr, and 11 in the remainder of the parish). By 1858, this had increased to 115 licensed outlets, including 44 public houses (28 in

⁷ Kendall had already steered the Monmouthshire Canal Act through Parliament in the 1790s: Evans, p.135; Lloyd, p.182.

⁸ Report of Education Commission, 1847, PP, XXVII, p.63

⁹ Jennings, p.51

¹⁰ Thomas Jordan, *My Reminiscences of the Old Clydach Ironworks and Neighbourhood*, (n. pub., 1909), unpaginated.

¹¹ Education Commission, evidence of John Hughes, p.98, and John Powell, p.124

Brynmawr and 16 in the rest of the parish). In 1881, there were 65 public houses in Brynmawr, which thus enjoyed a ratio of a public house to every 86 head of population.

The Education Report of 1847 included statistics of offences coming before the Magistrates for the Crickhowell Hundred in 1845-6. This Hundred included Brynmawr and Llanelly Hill, and the statistics were broken down between the agricultural and mining populations. The total population of the Hundred was estimated at about 18,000, with roughly 12,300 of these employed in manufacturing (i.e. iron making) and mining.

Table 9.1 - Offences before Magistrates, Crickhowell Hundred, 1845-6

	Agricultural & Non-mining		Mining	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Fined	10	0	46	5
Imprisoned	4	0	3	1
Committed for Trial	0	0	2	0
Total	14	0	51	6

Source: Education Commission, 1847, PP, XXVII, p.64

Table 9.1 shows a preponderance of petty offences (i.e. those marked by fines) amongst the male population of the mining districts, probably associated for a large part with drunkenness. Over a two year period, however, there were only 5 offences attracting imprisonment, compared with 4 in the much smaller non-mining population. Petty crime may have been extensive in the industrial community, but it was not predisposed to serious offending.

By 1858, Brynmawr had a police station and twice monthly Petty Sessions. As late as the 1890s, the police court at Brynmawr dealt with a steady stream of cases involving drunkenness and assault, a common feature of which was assaults on police.

There was a close link between drunkenness and wage levels. A trade depression between 1842-6 had reduced wage levels across the South Wales coalfield. By the mid-1840s, the recession was ending, and wage levels began to recover. This

was accompanied by an increase in the amount people drank. The 1847 Education Commissioners witnessed this at first hand in Brynmawr, where they remarked upon the lawlessness and increase in drunkenness following the recovery in wages. In 1846, the population of the ironbelt, emerging from the recent recession, were 'a people immersed in the habits of sensuality and improvidence, earning high wages, wasting nearly one week in five [the week following pay day] in idleness and drunkenness' ¹².

Associated with drunkenness, were 'other vices of deep and reckless sensuality'¹³. The rate of illegitimate births, which might be taken as one indicator of 'reckless sensuality', was however relatively low. Greenhow recorded an illegitimate birth rate, per 1,000 births, of 4.79 for the Abergavenny area, and 4.45 for Merthyr Tydfil. He examined ten districts in all, and Abergavenny and Merthyr were eighth and tenth lowest on that list respectively, with Nottingham being the highest, with a rate of 10.04¹⁴.

Tremenheere blamed the population's intemperate habits partly on employers for not providing adequate housing, and on the lack of educational provision: 'Domestic discomfort aids the attractions of the public house' and 'the low standard of education among the adults deprives them of better means of enjoyment'¹⁵. His observations about lack of educational provision helped fuel the drive to provide better educational facilities.

Alcohol was consumed in considerable quantity at the workplace: 'the craving of the firemen was for drink, drink, drink'¹⁶. It was no coincidence that the nearest public house to the Clydach furnaces was called The Fireman's Arms. Furnacemen hired small boys, or 'fetchers', to bring in beer – a practice disapproved of by the Clydach ironmaster, Edward Frere: ' "John, what have you got there, and where have

¹² Report of the Commissioners into the Operation of the Mines Act, Report on South Wales, PP, 1846, XXIV, p.31

¹³ Report of the Commissioners into the Mines Act, p.32

¹⁴ Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, 4th annual report, 1861, PP, 1862, XXII, Appendix IV: Dr Greenhow's Report on the Excessive Mortality of Young Children among certain Manufacturing Populations.

¹⁵ Greenhow, p.35

¹⁶ Lewis Browning, *Blaenavon, Monmouthshire, a Brief Historical Sketch*, (Minerva, 1906), p.34.

you been? ... John, fetch me that big stone", and the demolition of the article that bore the fetching would soon be the result'¹⁷.

Industrial Unrest

Two features which helped differentiate the irontowns from closed villages were the size and mobility of their populations, which could combine to considerable effect at times of conflict with their employers.

The first recorded dispute at Clydach was in 1793, when Thomas Cooke shut down the Llanelly furnace in response to his workmen's proposal to form a union – something which would be outlawed by the Combination Act of 1799¹⁸. Whether this dispute was fuelled by the contemporary political climate is open to speculation. The previous year has been suggested as the peak year for industrial disputes in the eighteenth century¹⁹, and there had been widespread demands for wage increases in Merthyr, where 'the Damnable Doctrines of Dr Priestly & Payne' were influencing Dissenting opinion²⁰. Evans refers to Merthyr workmen at this time as 'participants in the "veritable explosion of strike activity" of 1792, coincident with, and annexed to, the floodtide of Paine-ite radicalism'²¹. Merthyr had a strong Jacobin tradition, and was a fermenting ground for radical Dissenting sects, such as Arminianism and Unitarianism. There was no such history of radicalism in Llanelly parish, though events there in 1793 may have been influenced by goings-on elsewhere.

Wales experienced its share of corn riots in the period 1793 to 1801²², sparked by the harvest failures of 1795-6 and 1799-1801, and the famines which followed. The

¹⁷ Revd. Arthur Griffiths, *Annals and Reminiscences of the Parish of Llanelly* (Brecon, 1900) p.11

¹⁸ W.E. Minchinton, 'The Place of Brecknock in the Industrialisation of South Wales', *Brycheiniog*, VII, 1961, p. 28, and Emlyn Edwards, *Chronology of Llanelly Parish Industry*, (n. pub., 1968) (no pagination).

¹⁹ Evans, p.187, f.32, referring to C. R. Dobson, *Masters and Journeymen: A Prehistory of Industrial Relations, 1717-1800*, (1980), though stating that Dobson's statistics provide 'only the barest indication of the real dimensions of strike activity'.

²⁰ Evans, pp.186-188, quoting Cyfarthfa's master, Richard Crawshay.

²¹ Evans, p.187

²² D.J.V. Jones, *Before Rebecca*, pp.13-34.

effect of harvest failures on local corn prices is evident from the average market price of wheat in relation the Crickhowell Hundred and the town of Abergavenny²³:

Year	Price per bushel (shillings/pence)
1798	8 to 8/6
1799	8/6 to 12
1800	16 to 25
1801	10 to 12/6
1802	10 to 12/6

Grain prices were sometimes further inflated by the sharp practices of corn factors and speculators, eager to cash in on the scarcity. Some historians have therefore commented on the 'moral economy' of eighteenth century food riots, meaning that the rioters were convinced of the legitimacy of their aims, and sought no more than the distribution of foodstuffs at a fair price²⁴. In the year when local grain prices were at their highest (1800), a corn 'riot' occurred at Llangattock. In March of that year, a gang of miners hijacked a consignment of bran and barley meal which was en route from Abergavenny to the Dowlais ironworks. The gang was led by William of Clydach (William Phillip) which suggests other miners from Llanelly parish may have been involved. The grain was diverted to the Beaufort ironworks where it was hoped the clerk to the furnaces would buy it, and in turn make it available for general purchase. Grain was similarly intercepted by townspeople at Swansea, and by Forest of Dean colliers who targeted grain on the River Wye bound for Bristol.

In May 1804, colliers and miners on Llanelly Hill went on strike over reductions in their wages. The reduction had apparently come about because the coal and iron ore received at the furnaces contained a great deal of 'dirt and rubbish', for

²³ Revd. Henry Thomas Payne, material collected towards a history of Breconshire, (NLW, Minor Deposits, 187A), pp. 44-46

²⁴ The 'moral economy' is referred to by Evans, p.166 et seq., in connection with Merthyr food riots in 1800.

which the mineral agent was blamed²⁵. The strike had resolved itself by September²⁶ but by the end of that month miners were again threatening to walk out over a proposal to reduce the price of mine by 3d or 4d in every shilling. This reduction was part of a bid by John Powell to cut labour costs by 25% due to the poor state of trade²⁷. Much of the production cost of iron went in labour (some estimate as much as 70%) and any drop in market price was usually passed on in wage reductions. The reverse could also apply: in August 1805, the Clydach works was enjoying a 'brisk trade in iron', and by December of the same year colliers had given notice to strike unless they received more pay, though this action did not materialise²⁸.

The economic recession that followed the end of war with France ushered in a period of instability. Disturbances by Luddites, Blanketeers, and famous episodes such as the Peterloo Massacre, all date to this period, as unemployment and falling wages were exacerbated by the bad harvests of 1816-17. Rural discontent in Llanelly parish led to the conviction in 1819 of an agricultural labourer, who was sentenced to 5 years imprisonment for burning down a hayrick²⁹. But the most serious outbreak occurred in the industrial sector, with a strike in October 1816. This began at Tredegar, when a cut in puddlers' wages was announced. The focal point shifted to Merthyr, when a large body of men estimated at between 8,000 and 10,000 marched on the town from all over the ironbelt ³⁰. There was probably some local involvement, since the strikers marched on successive ironworks, including Blaenavon and Clydach, putting out furnaces and amassing support. The cavalry were duly called in to Merthyr. At Nantyglo, the Monmouthshire cavalry became involved in a stand-off with several hundred men from Blaenavon, Nantyglo, and Llanelly parish, who were en route to

²⁵ Letter, Thomas Phillips to Walter and John Powell, 16th May, 1804, (Maybery, 3195)

²⁶ Letters, Thomas Phillips to Walter and John Powell, 17th April, 16th and 22nd May, 2nd June, and 15th September, 1804, (Maybery, 3191, 3195-7, and 3202).

²⁷ Letters, Phillips to the Powells, 28th and 30th September, 1804 (Maybery, 3204-5).

²⁸ Letters, Phillips to the Powells, 2nd August, 18th and 26th December 1805 (Maybery, 3227, 3238 and 3239).

²⁹ D.J.V. Jones, *Before Rebecca: Popular Protest in Wales 1793-1835* (Allen Lane 1973), p.58.

³⁰ D.J.V. Jones, pp. 74-9

Merthyr. The crowd dispersed when the Riot Act was read by the Magistrate, the Reverend William Powell of Abergavenny.

The 1816 strike was relatively short, but marked a shift in working class leadership, from the traditionally radical Merthyr Tydfil, to the iron towns in the eastern valleys of Monmouthshire (where the strike lasted longest). It was here, in an area known as 'The Black Domain', that the Scotch Cattle emerged in the 1820s and 30s³¹.

The Scotch Cattle

The Scotch Cattle were an attempt to ensure solidarity amongst workers during times of strike or other industrial unrest. Their methods were coercive, and consisted of the issuing of written warnings, followed by violence if these went unheeded. Their usual targets were strike breakers, mining contractors, and shopkeepers, particularly those who ran company shops. They also targeted bailiffs and those working 'below price' (i.e. for low wages). The name may refer to the Scots Greys regiment, who were stationed on the coalfield, or to herds of black-faced Scotch Cattle kept by some ironmasters (the Scotch Cattle frequently blackened their faces as a means of disguise). They were a product of the Monmouthshire sale-coal collieries, where work fluctuated according to seasonal demands for coal, and where the truck system and debt were widespread, but were also present in the mines and collieries attached to local ironworks. They did not extend to the mining communities at Merthyr³².

The Scotch Cattle were organised in 'herds' each led by a *Tarw Scotch*, or Scotch Bull. One of the best known Bulls in the Llanelly Hill area was 'Commander' John Evans, of Blaenavon. Though anonymity was important, the fact the identity of Bulls might be known, or guessed at, did not lead to effective action being taken

³¹ The Black Domain was a term coined by the Commissions of Enquiry which reported on disturbances on the South Wales coalfield.

³² Evans, p.202: 'the insecurity which pervaded the primitive colliery villages of Monmouthshire was not to be found at Merthyr, where workmen could draw on traditions of solidarity that had long been nurtured within the iron trade'.

against them because of the intimidation of witnesses. The ages of those Cattle who did appear in court ranged from 18 to 29, with an average age of 27³³. They were mostly coal rather than iron miners because coal mining was a more precarious form of employment.

Attacks by the Scotch Cattle usually took place at night, and involved the destruction of property rather than an attack on the person. Herds did not carry out attacks in their own communities for fear of identification and to avoid any conflicts of communal loyalty. The ransacking of the home, late at night, by a group of men with blackened faces, one of whom – the bull - may have been wearing horns, was also no doubt an alarming and humiliating experience. Humiliation was an important part of popular justice, and had its roots in punishments like the *ceffyl pren*, or wooden horse, of rural Wales, which involved an adulterer being dragged through the streets on a wooden frame. The use by the Cattle of women's clothing as a disguise was also familiar: it had been used in the 1820s by protesters against enclosure in Cardiganshire, and would be used again in the 1830s and early 1840s by the Rebecca rioters of west Wales, who smashed tollgates in protest against the burdensome tolls on agricultural lime.

The Scotch Cattle became prominent at times of economic hardship. In 1822, a strike began at Nantyglo when wages were cut during a recession in the iron trade. As in 1816, the strike spread and was marked by episodes of violence, most notably when colliers tried to prevent coal reaching blast furnaces at the Ebbw Vale Ironworks via the Monmouthshire Canal. A crowd of several hundred coal miners tore up a tramroad and hurled rocks from a cliff top above a narrow valley. The Clydach ironmaster and magistrate, Edward Frere, was bludgeoned about the head, and a detachment of Scots Greys from Abergavenny had to open fire, wounding several

³³ Marie-Elaine Bidder, 'Scotch Cattle in Monmouthshire: 1820-1825', *Journal of the Gwent Local History Council*, 63, (1987) p.4

rioters, before the crowd broke up. Over the next few days, there was extensive destruction of canal company property³⁴.

In April, local magistrates became concerned at 'system of terror and intimidation' and offered a reward for information leading to the conviction of 'evil-disposed persons who go about the collieries threatening and intimidating and keeping persons from their lawful business'³⁵. Strikers at this stage were already resorting to begging however, and by 18th May, all was 'tolerably quiet on the hills' outside Abergavenny, and a week later five hundred Blaenavon men had gone back to work³⁶.

In 1823, colliers on Llanelly Hill went on strike for 9 weeks between May and August. The cause of the dispute was the location of the weighing machine, which was now some two miles from the coalface. As a result there was a considerable pilfering and spillage of coal before the trams could be weighed. This was a cause for concern for colliers who were paid by weight, and the problem was eventually addressed by the Coal Mines Regulations Act of 1887, which provided that minerals were to be weighed as near to the pit mouth as possible. In May, 1823, fifteen of the eighty colliers on Llanelly Hill struck without notice, and the windows of those who remained at work were smashed³⁷. A number of strikers, including three ringleaders, were imprisoned at Brecon for forming 'an illegal and improper combination'³⁸. It was now that 'slight acts of violence' began to occur³⁹. John Lloyd wrote of the Clydach Ironworks that 1823 saw 'rough times with the workmen', and that a great many cases at Brecon Assizes involved assaults from the Llanelly district. A memorable individual protest occurred when one coal miner walked naked from his cottage to Llanelly church, though the precise cause of his grievance is not given⁴⁰.

³⁴ For coverage of this strike, see *The Cambrian*, 4th, 11th, and 18th May, 1822

³⁵ Meeting of the Duke of Beaufort and local magistrates at the Three Salmons Hotel, Usk, reported in *The Cambrian*, 4th May, 1822.

³⁶ *The Cambrian*, 18th and 25th May, 1822.

³⁷ Letters, John Scale to John Jones, 29th and 31st May, 1823, (Maybery 3332-3)

³⁸ *The Cambrian*, 31st May, 1822

³⁹ *The Cambrian*, 14th June, 1822.

⁴⁰ Lloyd, p.195

On 17th July, 1823, a written warning was posted to colliers on Llanelly Hill who intended returning to work. This notice, written in a mixture of Welsh and English, is one of the few Cattle warnings to have survived, and is reproduced here in full:

How many times we give notice to you about going into work before you settle all together to go on better terms than what you ask at present. Notice to you David Thomas John, David Davies and Andrew Cross, that the Bull and his friends are all alive and the Vale of Llamarch is wide, and who [woe?] shall be to you, since death you shall doubtless have, all at once, you may depend upon this. It may be that the night you do not expect we shall come again. We are not afraid were you to go all at once to work.⁴¹

One writer has raised the question of whether Scotch Cattle attacks were racially motivated because commands were given in Welsh, and those apprehended were usually Welsh speaking⁴². But this is equally likely to have been due to the fact that Welsh was the majority language at the time. Race may have been an issue indirectly if English in-migrants as a group were reluctant to take action, as when Staffordshire men at the Blaenavon Ironworks refused to join the 1839 Chartist march on Newport⁴³. Andrew Cross, cited above, was an English speaker, but received a warning because he was intending to return to work⁴⁴.

The 1822 strike also involved complaints against the doggy system. Imprisoned coal miners complained that the master collier, a man called James, took no heed of their grievances, would never let them have a statement of their account, and treated them with great harshness. They had not taken their complaints to the

⁴¹ Reproduced in the appendix to Lloyd; and in Edwards's typescript.

⁴² Bidder, p.4

⁴³ Jeremy Knight, 'Blaenavon Ironworks, 1789-1976: a Preliminary Survey', *Journal of the South East Wales Industrial Archeology Society*, 2 .3, p.31

⁴⁴ Cross was a founder member of Nazareth English speaking Baptist Chapel.

works manager because it was not customary to look to anyone except the master collier as their immediate employer⁴⁵.

The works manager, when he learnt of the colliers' complaints, acknowledged that their grievances were genuine and that his investigations were likely to show James in a bad light⁴⁶.

During this strike the Scotch Cattle attacked a man named James Powell. In early July, the Clydach ironmaster and solicitor, John Powell, advised that the attack was a case of riot and assault, but would not come within the Black Acts, because the attackers, although disguised, were not armed⁴⁷. By the end of July, men were returning to work: 'starvation' as the works manager noted, 'produces wonders'⁴⁸. Despite this, the strike was successful: a wall was built around the weighing machine to prevent pilfering of coal, house rents were reduced, and colliers were to be paid for house coal taken from their trams⁴⁹.

The 1820s were a decade of continual disruption at the Clydach Ironworks. In June 1824, fifteen colliers gave in their notice with a demand for a wage increase following a rise in wages at the Nantyglo Ironworks⁵⁰. The Clydach manager duly upped his colliers' wages by 3d per day, but shortly thereafter was faced with twenty six disaffected iron miners⁵¹.

The activities of the Scotch Cattle were normally confined to mining communities, but in 1826 the furnacemen at Clydach stopped work, following notice of a wage reduction, because the colliers had threatened them with instant death if they refused to do so⁵².

⁴⁵ Letter, John Powell to John Scale, 20th June 1823, (Maybery, 3340)

⁴⁶ Letter, Scale to Powell, 23rd June 1823, (Maybery, 3341)

⁴⁷ Letter, Powell to Scale, 2nd July 1823, (Maybery, 3346)

⁴⁸ Letters, John Scale to John Powell, and Edward Thomas to John Scale, both dated 23rd July 1823, (Maybery, 3349-50)

⁴⁹ The Cambrian, 9th August, 1823

⁵⁰ Letter, John Scale to John Powell, 29th June 1824, (Maybery, 3381)

⁵¹ Letters, Scale to Powell, 22nd and 29th July 1824, (Maybery, 3383-4)

⁵² Letter, Scale to Powell, 27th May 1826 (Maybery, 3886)

Managers and workmen were not always at loggerheads. Miners and colliers at the Clydach Ironworks accepted wage cuts in August 1826⁵³, and in December the same year, Frere agreed to the works' doctor being dismissed and replaced with a surgeon preferred by his workmen, even going so far as to recommend that the workmen should have more management and control of the medical club⁵⁴.

D.J.V. Jones wrote that the activities of the Scotch Cattle abated in the mid 1820s, when wages generally rose at Clydach, Nantyglo and Blaenavon, but that they re-emerged at the beginning of the 1830s⁵⁵.

In September and October, 1833, the Cattle attacked three mining contractors on Llanelly Hill: Rees Jones, who had had his earthenware and furniture broken, William Whitney, and William Powell. Whitney described a fairly typical attack. His door was broken down at 2.00 am, his and his family's clothes were burnt, and his loft set on fire. Seven or eight men with blackened faces tried to drag him out from under his bed, where he had somewhat ungallantly taken refuge. The attack on Powell was similar in nature.

In March 1834, James Jones, a miner from Llanelly Hill, was acquitted at Brecon Assizes of feloniously sending a threatening letter to William Eynon and to the contractor, Rees Jones⁵⁶. The letter was a written warning from the Scotch Cattle, which had the desired effect: 'the men were frightened; they would not go in'⁵⁷. Rees Jones testified that he 'did not know the meaning of "Scotch Law"', but that 'there are many injured by it'. The root cause of the Scotch Cattle's violence at this time was put succinctly by the prisoner, when he told the Clydach ironmaster: 'Master, put down those doggies, and you will hear no more Scotch Cattle'⁵⁸.

⁵³ Letters, Scale to Powell, 6th and 31st August 1826, (Maybery, 3525 and 3529)

⁵⁴ Letters, Scale to Powell, 1st and 9th December 1826, (Maybery, 3534 and 3536), and Edward Frere to John Powell, 4th January 1827, (Maybery, 3541).

⁵⁵ D.J.V. Jones, p.97

⁵⁶ The trial is reported in the Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette, and Merthyr Guardian, 29th March, 1834, from which the quotation is taken.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

The Scotch Cattle extended their sphere of operations beyond the enforcement of strikes. They attempted to regulate their workplace and protect their jobs. The permission of the Cattle was needed before a newcomer could be taken underground and introduced to 'the art and mystery of mining'. This permission was usually forthcoming on payment of a fee. As late as 1839, Evan Thomas was 'scotched' at Brynmawr, for failing to obtain such permission⁵⁹.

There was a successful prosecution conducted against the Scotch Cattle in 1835, when one of their number was hanged for an accidental but fatal shooting. This, together with the emergence of Chartism in the 1830s, saw their activities wane. (Some of their later warnings came to contain the word 'Reform'). Their last activity was in 1850 at Aberdare. By 1909, they were the stuff of myth on Llanelly Hill: 'I have seen many a cottage clock with its bronze face battered and was told that the "Scotch Cattle" had done it long before my time'⁶⁰.

Later Industrial Unrest

The two most significant episodes of unrest on the South Wales coalfield at this time were the Merthyr Rising in 1831, when townspeople angered by debt and the truck system, captured and held the town against the military for four days⁶¹, and the Chartist March on Newport in 1839. The following decade, despite being dubbed the 'Hungry Forties' were more peaceable. They were not without incident, however, because a recession and falling wages led to a strike in 1842, and the early 1840s also saw the re-emergence of Chartism at Brynmawr amongst other places. Blaenavon had an eight month strike in 1846, and a three week strike in 1850, which prompted the building of a barracks at the town to quell civil disturbances⁶².

⁵⁹ Bidder, pp 12-13

⁶⁰ Thomas Jordan

⁶¹ This is dealt with fully in Gwyn A. Williams, *The Merthyr Rising* (Croom Helm, 1980). It resulted in the death of two dozen insurrectionists, and the wounding of seventy more. The rioters were successful in disarming the Swansea Yeomanry and turning back an ammunition train. The Rising was reputedly the first occasion in Great Britain of a red flag being flown, when a sheet was dipped in lamb's blood.

⁶² Browning, p. 74

Between about 1860 and 1880 there was a widespread depression across the South Wales ironbelt, marking a hiatus between the decline of the iron industry and the start of the boom in steam coal. The 1870s saw the rise of unionism on the coalfield, and a succession of serious strikes in 1871, 1873, and 1875. Brynmawr, because of its central position, was a natural meeting place, and had a history of trade unionism and Chartism. Union clubs had been formed in the town during strikes in 1801, 1810, and 1816⁶³, and Chartist lodges appeared in the 1830s and 40s.

The growth of unionism was at times a divisive factor. During the 1873 strike, there were four coal miners' lodges at Brynmawr based around public houses⁶⁴. Because men now worked at different collieries, they were members of different district lodges, and sometimes held differing views. At the 1893 South Wales hauliers' strike, the miners' agent at Ebbw Vale, Thomas Richards, (later President of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain) instructed his men not to strike because a month's notice had not been given under the Sliding Scale Agreement⁶⁵. Following attacks on Ebbw Vale coal miners, their employers issued them with wooden clubs. Pitched battles then took place between Ebbw Vale and Brynmawr men, with armbands used to identify friend from foe⁶⁶.

The 1893 hauliers' strike crippled many mines, and coincided with a strike in Blaenavon collieries for a 20% wage increase beyond the scope of the Sliding Scale. The strike caused 'great privation' on Llanelly Hill, many of whose coal miners now worked at Blaenavon and were forced to seek work elsewhere⁶⁷.

In the early 1890s, the miners' leader William Brace was given a warm reception at meetings he addressed in Blaenavon. Brace, a Lib-Lab MP from Monmouthshire, was a militant with a hard line attitude to collective bargaining. Brace favoured affiliation to the MFGB, which necessitated the abolition of the

⁶³ Jennings, pp. 19 and 62

⁶⁴ Jennings. p. 67

⁶⁵ An agreement which linked wages to the price of coal.

⁶⁶ Abergavenny Chronicle, 18th August, 1893; Jennings, p.68

⁶⁷ Abergavenny Chronicle, 20th January, 1893.

Sliding Scale. The mood of local miners was veering towards him, and away from another Lib-Lab MP, the moderate and conciliatory William Abraham ('*Mabon*') who had negotiated the Sliding Scale, and who favoured small independent unions.

There had been much violence on the coalfield perpetrated by a largely disenfranchised population. It had no direct political voice, and no-one at Parliament to represent its interests. The remainder of this chapter examines that lack of political representation, the gradual extension of the franchise and how that effected the parliamentary political landscape.

The Political Background

From the latter part of the seventeenth century, four landed families dominated local politics in Breconshire, contesting between them the county seat and the borough of Brecon. Those families were: Williams of Gwernyfed, Jones of Buckland, Jeffreys of the Priory, and Morgan of Tredegar, in Monmouthshire. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Morgan family established an hegemony, monopolising both shire and borough seats, plus the county seat for Monmouthshire. All these families were Tory, with the exception of the Whiggish Morgans, though party allegiances only became a factor when elections were fought against a background of political crisis⁶⁸.

At the 1806 general election Sir Charles Morgan retired, and the county seat was won by Thomas Wood representing the Jefferys and Williams interest. Wood was to hold the seat until 1847. Wood, a native of Middlesex, was resident in that county or London during Parliamentary sessions, corresponding with his agent in constituency affairs, and visiting Breconshire during the recess. The first of the three challenges to his seat came when the Morgans tried to regain the county at the 1818 election, hoping to garner support from local resentment at Wood's sympathetic stance on Catholic emancipation. There was a protracted campaign, resulting in a narrow majority of 37

⁶⁸ Peter G. Thomas, 'Parliamentary Elections in Brecknockshire, 1689-1832', *Brycheiniog*, VI (1960), 99-113, pp. 99-100.

for Wood from 1,641 votes. This narrow victory probably had as much to do with the continuing influence of the Morgan dynasty as with Catholic emancipation as a political issue. A local agent at the time stated: 'Party matters do not I think in the least run high in this Town, the subject being very seldom mentioned'⁶⁹.

Wood took a limited view on Reform, advocating disenfranchisement of rotten boroughs and some extension of the franchise to large populous towns, or 'repair', as he put it, fighting shy of the word 'reform'⁷⁰. A Reform candidate, John Watkins, stood against him at the 1831 election, but withdrew after the first day's poll, due to the size of Wood's lead⁷¹. This suggests that the Breconshire electorate were hostile to or apathetic on the question of Reform. They were certainly opposed to the repeal of the Corn Laws (many would have been farmers) as Wood incurred their displeasure in his support for Peel's proposals. This local opposition, and the failing health of his wife, prompted Wood's retirement in 1847⁷².

The county seat then passed to the Nantyglo ironmaster, Sir Joseph Bailey, until 1858, when the Morgan family regained the county to 1875. Throughout this period, the member for Breconshire remained Conservative. Only in 1874 did a Liberal candidate stand, unsuccessfully. The county returned its first Liberal member, Fuller-Maitland, in 1875, by a majority of 103. From then on, the county continued to return Liberals for the remainder of the century. The transformation was complete when, in 1886 and 1900, a Liberal stood unopposed.

The Reform Acts

The 1832 Reform Act did little to change the face of Breconshire politics. The county electorate rose from 1,668 in 1832 to 2,799 in 1841⁷³. The electorate in Llanelly parish in 1833 was 127, or 5.82% of the male population at the 1831 census. This was

⁶⁹ Sir Charles Morgan's Agent, referring to Brecon, August, 1817, quoted in Peter G. Thomas, p.111

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Wood, *Thomas Wood, MP: Parliamentary Representative for Brecknockshire, 1806-47*, (Brecknock Museum Publication, 1978), p.28-9.

⁷¹ Peter G. Thomas, p.113.

⁷² Elizabeth Wood, p.30

⁷³ Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, vol.2, p.128

the highest number of electors of any parish in the Crickhowell Hundred, probably because Llanelly parish was the most populous. The other industrialised parish, also densely populated, was Llangattock, which had the second biggest electorate, with 87⁷⁴.

After the 1867 Reform Act, the Breconshire electorate stood at 3,600 at the 1868 general election. The 1867 Act is said to have had the biggest impact in industrial boroughs, and that was certainly the case in Merthyr Tydfil, whose electorate leapt from 760 in 1841 to 14,500 in 1868⁷⁵. The 1868 election proved a turning point for Merthyr, and ultimately for Wales, when the newly enfranchised electorate returned the Nonconformist Liberal, Henry Richard, ahead of Gladstone's Home Secretary, H.A. Bruce (later Lord Aberdare). This foreshadowed what was to become a kind of golden age for Welsh parliamentary Liberalism, culminating in the premiership of Lloyd George. In Breconshire, however, the 1867 Act had no immediate impact in representative terms: at the 1868 election, Breconshire was one of the seven Welsh counties (out of a total of twelve) where there was no contest, and the Tory candidate Morgan was again elected unopposed.

The eviction of tenants in Merioneth at the 1859 election, for not voting the way their landlord wanted, had brought a social and political divide sharply into focus, and further evictions in Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire took place at the 1868 election. Rural voters, qualifying by virtue of a £50 per annum rent, were usually tenants-at-will, with an annual tenancy, and thus particularly susceptible to landlord pressure⁷⁶. Ironmasters often had similar expectations that those of their workforce who qualified for the vote would act in accordance with their wishes (as did Lady Charlotte Guest, for example, wife of the Dowlais ironmaster Sir John Guest). Though the 1868 election did not lead locally to a result such as that at Merthyr, nor did it lead

⁷⁴ Parish figures given by *The Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette*, and *Merthyr Guardian*, 12th October, 1833

⁷⁵ Williams, vol.2, p.129

⁷⁶ I.G. Jones, 'Parliament and People in Mid-Nineteenth Century Wales', in *People and Protest: Wales 1815-1880*, ed. by Trevor Herbert & Gareth Elwyn Jones, (University of Wales Press, 1988), pp.45-6

to evictions or landlord pressure, there were still disturbances. Feelings ran high at Blaenavon when rioters ransacked shops and looted the Red Lion Hotel. The White Horse Inn was only saved by the timely actions of the proprietor who, in a swift change of political allegiance, replaced the blue banners that flew from his building with red ones. Some felt that blame for the disturbance attached to the Liberal Party, whereas others felt politics had little to do with it, and it was rather 'pure mischief-making on the part of a crowd of rowdies'⁷⁷. Whatever the true causes, the incident was serious enough for troops to be despatched from Newport to quell the disturbance.

At the 1874 election the Liberal Maitland stood for Breconshire, only to be defeated by 1,594 votes to 1,036. At a by-election the following year, Maitland was successful by a slender majority of 103. His success may have had something to do with the fact he was no longer standing against the powerful interest of the Morgan family, though, at the 1880 election, Maitland increased his majority to 260 over the Hon. A.J. Morgan.

The 1884 Reform Act did far more to transform Breconshire politics than either of its predecessors. The Breconshire electorate stood at 9,520 in 1885 (up from 3,600 in 1868)⁷⁸. In addition, the Representation of the People Act of 1885 abolished the borough seat of Brecon town, which, as Professor Morgan notes, was a blow to the Whig gentry⁷⁹. From that point onwards, Breconshire continued to return a Liberal member for the remainder of the century, unopposed in 1886 and at the Khaki election of 1900. But although the extension of the franchise saw a swing from Tory to Liberal, Liberalism in Breconshire was not Welsh Liberalism at its most radical. The member for Breconshire was one of two Welsh Liberal MPs to walk out of a debate on a Bill to establish a land court in Wales along the lines of the Irish model⁸⁰. At the first elections to the newly established County Councils, in January 1889, the Liberals gained control of every Welsh County Council except Breconshire. A prominent

⁷⁷ Browning, pp.43-44

⁷⁸ Williams, vol.2, p.131

⁷⁹ K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980*, (University of Wales Press, 1981) p.28

⁸⁰ K.O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868-1922*, (University of Wales Press, 1963) p.97

figure on the Breconshire County Council was the ironmaster Sir Joseph Bailey, Conservative MP for Herefordshire, and a firm opponent of Disestablishment - a cause dear to the heart of Nonconformist Welsh Liberals.

If Breconshire did not embrace Liberalism quite so wholeheartedly as some areas of Wales, it at least developed a Liberal press. The abolition of the duty on newspapers in 1855 had lent impetus to the development of the press in Wales as elsewhere. The Welsh press was also becoming increasingly politicised. In 1866, the Brecon County Times was founded, and in 1889 the Brecon and Radnor Express. Both were Liberal in outlook and owed much to the Liberal journalist, Edwin Poole⁸¹. The other newspaper in circulation, the Brecknock Beacon (founded 1882) was Conservative in political outlook.

This was the broad political background of the period, but for much of the nineteenth century many working people played little part in the democratic process, as shown by the limited nature of the franchise and the attempts made to widen it.

Chartism

Following dissatisfaction with the 1832 Reform Act, the Chartist movement found some support in South Wales through the influence of the Chartist orator Henry Vincent, and the Carmarthen solicitor Hugh Williams. In 1838-9, there were a number of Workingmen's Associations formed in Carmarthenshire, the weaving towns of Mid-Wales, such as Llanidloes, and the South Wales towns of Pontypool, Swansea, and Newport. These Associations again featured crafts and tradesmen, not industrial workers⁸². The Monmouthshire irontowns formed their own Chartist leadership, again consisting of local artisans and tradesmen: John Frost, a draper and one time Mayor of Newport; William Jones, a Pontypool watchmaker; and Zephaniah Williams, a Nantyglo publican.

⁸¹ Poole was author of *The History and Biography of Brecknockshire* (1886), staff correspondent of the Brecon County Times and editor and proprietor of The Brecon and Radnor Express.

⁸²D.J.V. Jones, 'Scotch Cattle and Chartism', in *People and Protest*, p.145

In November 1839, following Parliament's rejection of the Chartist petition, there occurred 'the most serious insurrectionary movement in nineteenth century Britain'⁸³, when, according to contemporary estimates, some 8,000 miners, many of them armed, marched on Newport, in the first of what was supposed to be a series of Chartist risings across the country. Three columns of Chartist supporters, from Nantyglo, Sirhowy, and Pontypool, were due to converge upon Newport, joining up just outside the town. In the event, the Pontypool column did not arrive in time, and the remaining two columns went on to mount an armed attack on the town's Westgate Hotel. They were repelled by a contingent of just 28 soldiers. Ten of the rioters were killed (other estimates say as much as thirty) and the three leaders were sentenced to be hanged for treason (later commuted to transportation). The defence of the town was organised by the Mayor, the Clydach-born Thomas Phillips, who was wounded in the attack and later knighted.

There is evidence of Chartist activity in and around Llanelly parish. Some of that evidence is circumstantial, such as the many eponymously named Chartists' Caves in the area, including one on Llangynidr Mountain opposite Llanelly Hill.⁸⁴ It was in such caves that meetings were held, and firearms stockpiled for the march on Newport. A Chartist Cave at Tredegar may have been used to murder informants.

Chartism spread through lodges and Workingmen's Associations. A Chartist lodge at Llanelly drew its membership from the Clydach Ironworks around 1839, but that little else is known of it⁸⁵. The covert nature of preparations for the Newport rising makes evidence difficult to uncover, but local opinion was divided: a fight took place at Pwlldu, between Chartists from Llanelly and a gang of puddlers from Garnddyris. Pwlldu and Garnddyris were forge sites belonging to the Blaenavon ironworks, and were a mile or so from Llanelly Hill⁸⁶. The root of this conflict lay in

⁸³ Ibid., p.148

⁸⁴ Peter Morgan Jones, *Hills of Fire and Iron*, (Old Bakehouse Publications, 1992) p.26

⁸⁵ Ivor Wilks, *South Wales and the Rising of 1839*, (Croom Helm, 1984) p.109

⁸⁶ They were also the location for Alexander Cordell's novel, *The Rape of the Fair Country*

the fact there was a large number of Staffordshire men at the Blaenavon works who boycotted the 1839 Chartist march⁸⁷.

The 1847 Education Commission reported that:

This district [the Brynmawr and Beaufort area] was one of the chief sources of Chartism. One of the main bodies of the mob who marched upon Newport congregated at and issued from thence⁸⁸.

The Brynmawr grocer and draper, Thomas Kershaw, gave evidence to the Commission, to the effect that 'The Chartist lodges were very numerous about here' and 'they entered the chapels and pressed the people to join them'⁸⁹. The chapels were perhaps an unlikely recruiting ground, since they were opposed to the physical force Chartism then being advocated in the South Wales iron district.

Chartist leaders were mostly tradesmen, not miners or colliers. Brynmawr had a well-developed retail and commercial sector, and hence a good number of tradesmen. It also had something of a radical history, having spawned secret unions based around public houses during strikes of 1801, 1810 and 1816. Two prominent Brynmawr Chartists were both shoemakers: 'King' Crispin, and David Lewis. Lewis, who was also a beerhouse keeper, addressed a Chartist meeting at the Royal Oak, Blaina, just three days before the march on Newport. Crispin was apparently tracked down following the Newport insurrection, and found to be hiding in one of his boot containers in Boundary Street⁹⁰.

Chartism in South Wales suffered a body blow at Newport, and by 1847 the Education Commission reported that 'Disaffection and sedition' at the town had subsided.

⁸⁷ Knight, p.31

⁸⁸ Report of Education Commission, 1847, PP, XXVII, p.62

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.75

⁹⁰ Malcolm Thomas, *Brynmawr, Beaufort and Blaina in Photographs*, (Old Bakehouse Publications, 1994), p.5

It is difficult to gauge the level of support for Chartism in the irontowns. D.J.V. Jones estimated that some 25,000 men and women had enrolled in Chartist Associations in Wales, and put this on a par with Chartist weavers of the West Riding⁹¹. But Nonconformist chapels were opposed to the movement, and their influence in the irontowns was considerable. Although large numbers marched on Newport, the depth of their commitment - outside the small artisan leadership - is another matter. Thomas Kershaw's evidence to the 1847 Education Commission was that 'some of the ring-leaders were educated here, but numbers of the ignorant were led into it quite innocently'⁹².

The Franchise on Llanelly Hill

For much of the nineteenth century the inhabitants of Llanelly Hill played little part in the democratic process. Few voters resided in Llanelly parish prior to the 1832 Reform Act, and those who did were usually too apathetic to travel to Brecon to register their vote.⁹³ The bulk of the Welsh populace was quick to take direct action to achieve its aims, but was not politically sophisticated. In the 1860s, English pressure groups such as the National Reform League and the National Reform Union, with their claims for manhood suffrage and the secret ballot, and the Liberation Society with its aim of removing Nonconformist legal disabilities, found the Welsh to be indifferent⁹⁴.

It is unlikely that either the 1832 or 1867 Reform Acts did much to extend the limited franchise on Llanelly Hill. The 1871 Register of Electors listed only 14 voters there. There is little to be gained by a study of poll books, because there was only one contested election between 1832 and the Secret Ballot Act of 1872, and the political views of such a small minority would not necessarily have been representative of the community at large.

⁹¹ D.J.V. Jones, 'Scotch Cattle and Chartism', p.148

⁹² Report of Education Commission, 1847, PP, XXVII, p.75

⁹³ Edwin Poole, *The History and Biography of Brecknockshire*, (Brecon, 1886) p.236

⁹⁴ I.G. Jones, 'Parliament and People', pp.41-2

Table 9.2 shows the Llanelly Hill electors of 1871, their age, residence, occupation and place of birth, together with the nature of their qualification to vote. Most electors were middle-aged coal or iron miners who, by some means, had acquired a freehold lease of one or more houses. The only exceptions to this were publicans. Of the 1871 electors, Richard Morris was publican at the Miners Arms, and Joseph Protheroe at the Colliers Arms. In the same year (1871) the Jolly Colliers was run by the widow Hannah Herbert, who would not have qualified in any event because of her sex.

Table 9.2 - Voters on Llanelly Hill, 1871

Voter	Residence	Age	Occupation	Birthplace	Qualification
Joseph Davies	Darenfelen	63	Platelayer	Mon.	FLHs
David Davies	Gellyfelen				FLHs
John Morgan Davies	Darenfelen				FLHs
Daniel Gwynne	Darenfelen	64	Coal miner	London	FLH
Roger James	Fedw Ddu				LLHG
John Jones	Darenfelen	35	Coal miner	Brecks.	FLHs
James Jones	Darenfelen				FLHs
James Matthews	Penffyddlwn	49	Coal miner	Brecks.	FLHs
William Morgan	Darenfelen				FLHs
Richard Morris	Llamarch	58	Coal miner*	Hereford	FLHs
Zachariah Patrick	Darenfelen	49	Coal miner	Mon.	FLHs
Joseph Protheroe	Llamarch	44	Iron miner**	Brecks.	FLHs
David Thomas	Darenfelen	54	Coal miner	Radnor	FLHs
David Walters	Cwm Nant Gam	57	Coal miner	Brecks.	FLHL

Source: Register of Electors, 1871; Census 1871, PRO (RG/10/5587)

Key: FLHs = Freehold lease of houses

FLHL = Freehold lease of house and land

LLHG = Lease for life of house and garden

* Retired coal miner, publican at Miners Arms

** Publican at Colliers Arms

By 1879, the Register of Electors included 23 voters on Llanelly Hill. The occupants of three public houses were enfranchised by virtue of occupying premises with a rateable value of £12 or more. These were: William Williams, the Miners Arms, John Williams, The Racehorse, and the occupant of the Newfoundout (whose name the Register omits). A total of 17 public houses in the parish attracted the franchise.

Three electors on Llanelly Hill qualified in respect of interests in more than one property: Daniel Jones (the coal miner and Baptist minister) James Matthews, and John Jones.

At the 1885 election, the first after the 1884 Reform Act, Wales returned 30 Liberal MPs from a total of 34. At the 'Liberal landslide' of the 1906 election, all 34 Welsh MPs were Liberal, except for Keir Hardie of the Labour Representation Committee, returned for the second Merthyr Tydfil seat. There was thus a strong Welsh Liberal presence at the House of Commons, which acted as an effective pressure group for Welsh Nonconformist interests. This period saw the introduction of the Welsh Sunday Closing Act (1881), the Welsh Intermediate Education Act (1889), the appointment of the Royal Commission on Land in Wales (1892) and, finally, the Disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Wales (achieved in 1914, but suspended until after the war). The politics of the Welsh working class was firmly Liberal and Nonconformist. In 1887, William Luther wrote of Llanelly Hill, that 'the inhabitants of this hilly district are nearly all of one opinion on the political question, and that is staunch Liberals ... the Conservative working men are few and far between'⁹⁵.

⁹⁵ William Luther, *Llanelly Hill and its Antiquities*, (n. pub., 1887) pp. 5-6

Chapter 10

Conclusions

Between 1790 and 1860, Llanelly parish was irreversibly transformed by the development of the South Wales iron industry. Its position at the edge of the South Wales coal basin meant the parish at first enjoyed the growth in population seen in the rest of the ironbelt, but its peripheral location, and the relatively minor importance of the Clydach Ironworks, meant that the fortunes and prosperity of the parish took a different turn from around 1860 onwards.

Population

The industrialised parishes in the south of Breconshire underwent a dramatic growth in population in the first half of the nineteenth century. The densest concentrations of population shifted from the best agricultural lands at the beginning of the century, to the industrial areas by the third quarter.¹ Much of this growth was due to in-migration, as in 1851, some 42% of the county's population had been born elsewhere. Despite this, the county remained for the most part rural, and the attraction of the increasingly industrialised counties of Monmouth and Glamorgan to the south, meant that, in the long term, Breconshire's net migration rate was actually negative.

Llanelly parish underwent a tenfold rise in population between 1801 and 1851, mostly through the in-migration of people from rural Breconshire. Its growth in this period was in line with the trend across the iron belt, though its absolute increase in population was less, here at the periphery of the coalfield, than immediately to the south in the teeming irontowns of Monmouthshire. The population of the parish peaked in 1851, fell slightly to 1861, and then entered a protracted decline following the failure of the Clydach Ironworks in 1861. The early failure, not only of the Clydach works, but of other, relatively minor works at the coalfield's edge - such as

¹ W.E. Minchinton, 'The Place of Brecknock in the Industrialisation of South Wales', *Brycheiniog*, Vol. VII, 1961, pp. 40-41

the nearby Beaufort works - was a portent for the South Wales iron industry as a whole. Factors such as the invention of processes of steel manufacture, and the emphasis on an export trade based nearer the coast, were determinative of a broader failure.

It was at this point that the history of Llanelly parish diverged most sharply from the bigger industrial centres to the south. It had neither the natural resources nor the central location to make a successful transition to coal mining. It was due to the development of the coal mining industry that the populations of the Monmouthshire Registration Sub-districts continued to rise in the later nineteenth century, in contrast to the struggling communities at the coalfield's northernmost edge. In Llanelly parish, collieries on Llanelly Hill continued to operate (the last mine, the Pinchey Colliery, closed in 1947) but these were too small to attract continuing population growth.

The growth in population of Llanelly parish to roughly 1851, and an upturn at the end of the century as rail afforded the opportunity for work in the Monmouthshire collieries to the south, was due to in-migration. Over half of the population of Llanelly Hill in 1851 had been born outside the parish, but the character of in-migration was overwhelmingly local: three quarters of Llanelly Hill's population had been born in Breconshire or neighbouring Monmouthshire, representing in-migration from rural areas (in the case of Breconshire) and migration internal to the iron industry (in the case of Monmouthshire). Important in the latter respect was the fact that the parish lay on the county border with Monmouthshire, with several Monmouthshire irontowns a short distance away. There were very few migrants from the counties of West Wales who made the lengthy journey to Llanelly Hill, although they populated the major centre of Merthyr Tydfil in large numbers². The principle was the same however: in-migration from nearby rural areas. There was a small but significant proportion of migrants from the English border counties, for many of whom the shortest route onto the coalfield lay through Llanelly parish. Yet the small settlements in the parish were,

² See generally Harold Carter & Sandra Wheatley, *Merthyr Tydfil in 1851: a Study of the Spatial Structure of a Welsh Industrial Town*, (University of Wales Press, 1982).

with the exception of Brynmawr, distinctly uncosmopolitan, as witnessed by the fact that no Irish migrants ever took root on Llanelly Hill, despite their presence in other areas. Brynmawr, with its Irish ghetto, and later on its Jewish shopkeepers, had more in common with the north Monmouthshire iron towns than the remainder of the parish: a fact recognised when the town became a separate parish in the 1870s.

With the failure of the Clydach Ironworks, in-migration lessened and became even more localised. The proportion of the population of Llanelly Hill born in Breconshire and Monmouthshire stood at 85% in 1891 (up from 75% forty years earlier) and lessening in-migration meant that 70% of the population were parish-born (up from 47% forty years previously). Other statistics showing the tailing off of in-migration were the drop in the percentage of Llanelly Hill households with lodgers: from 21.11% in 1851, to 9.79% in 1891, and the age structure of the population which showed something of a shift from a youthful to a late middle-aged or elderly bias, between the years 1851 and 1891, symptomatic of a community in decline.

Employment

Breconshire was a rural county, where agriculture provided the main employment. Similarly, Llanelly was a rural parish, but as early as 1801, the presence of the Clydach Ironworks meant that agriculture only employed about a third of the working population, with trade and manufacture employing roughly twice as many. The importance of agriculture as an employer had already been overshadowed, and agriculture would continue to decline as an employer as the century progressed.

The numbers of those employed in agriculture on Llanelly Hill was negligible. Pre-existing farms were acquired and turned to colliery uses – a pattern familiar to many mining areas, especially where a large number of horses were required for transport purposes. However, the rural surroundings of settlements like Llanelly Hill, and the agricultural origins of many of their inhabitants, meant that animal husbandry always played a part in people's lives even if agriculture itself did not give gainful employment.

The working population of Llanelly Hill in 1851 was devoted almost exclusively to coal and iron mining, with some 88% of the workforce being employed in those industries. The biggest impact on male employment patterns would be the closure of the Clydach Ironworks and the end of iron manufacture. This resulted in unemployment and the disappearance of iron miners from the workforce. Coal mining dominated the workforce in 1891, with 84% of the working population being thus employed – a figure remarkably similar to that of 1851, though the population was now smaller. Another change revealed indirectly by the census was probably one of a greater use of mechanisation, as the numbers of hauliers, ostlers and blacksmiths all fell between 1851 and 1891, with the emergence of a handful of engineers demonstrating a reliance on steam engines for haulage, rather than horses and donkeys as previously.

The early mining industry was notable for its dependence on child and female labour. If the closure of the Clydach works was the single biggest change in male employment, then the Mines Act of 1842, and a gradual shift in attitude towards the employment of women and children in heavy industry, were the biggest factors to affect female employment. The percentage of women in the workforce on Llanelly Hill fell from 14% to 8% between 1851 and 1891. It is difficult to gauge the extent to which the Act was at first observed, and, in so far as it only prohibited women from working underground, it did not prevent their importance as a source of labour at the surface. In the case of children, compulsory education and regulation of coal mines in the 1870s and 80s also helped eliminate them from the workplace.

There were important differences in the working life of women in mining communities compared, say, with rural agricultural ones. The surplus of young males and lack of employment opportunities outside heavy industry meant women tended to marry at an early age, and from that point on to dedicate themselves to home and family. It was rare for them to take employment outside the house, and there was little of the put-out labour often found in rural settlements.

Women did not generally work in domestic service, because there were few such opportunities in a community of low socio-economic status. As a result, there were high numbers of dependent women in the population, as noted, for example by Armstrong in relation to Sheffield, but not in a more prosperous place like Bath³. The exclusion of women from the mining workforce brought about a rise of 7% in the dependent population between 1851 and 1891, matched by a 7% drop in the proportion of the total population employed in mining.

The retail trade was relatively unimportant in the parish outside Brynmawr. Beyond the town there was only a thin distribution of shopkeepers and retailers. Brynmawr itself was associated with the more successful Nantyglo Ironworks, and had a more favourable location, both geographically at the head of several Monmouthshire valleys, and on the local transport network (coach road, then rail). So, by 1858, out of 331 tradespeople listed in a trade directory, 242 were located in Brynmawr. The most popular form of retail outlet was the public house, which was frequently regarded as a form of secondary occupation for a male head of household, though it no doubt provided valuable employment for his wife and family also, and is an example, perhaps, of much of the work that women did being unrecorded in the census.

Housing and Health

The population growth brought about by industrialisation resulted in some overcrowding of the available accommodation at the 1801 census. This was confined to the industrial part of the parish, Aberbaiden, where the mean household size was 10, as compared with only 5 in the non-industrial part, Maesygartha. The mean household size tells us little without some knowledge of the kind of accommodation involved. By 1811 the mean household size in both parts of the parish was around 5, which was the figure for Breconshire. Important here, is the fact that, although the parish population was increasing rapidly in percentage terms, the overall numbers

³ W.A. Armstrong, 'The Use of Information about Occupation', in E.A. Wrigley, Ed., *Nineteenth Century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data*, (Cambridge, 1972)

arriving were less than in the bigger urban and industrial centres, and so new housebuilding (which by now was taking place) was better able to keep pace with population increases. The Clydach Iron Company provided some housing, typically in the short rows so frequently found in the early iron settlements, but a significant feature of Llanelly Hill, Brynmawr, and other parts of the South Wales coalfield, was that workers were allowed by their employers to build their own houses. In Llanelly parish, worker-built housing tended to take place on open stretches of moorland, where there was plenty of space to build. It reflected a somewhat *laissez faire* attitude on the part of employers, who were presumably content not to have their capital and energies diverted from the production process. On Llanelly Hill, it led to a dispersed settlement pattern at Llamarch, as workers erected houses and helped themselves to a small amount of ground at the same time, in a process which encroached upon moorland owned by the Duke of Beaufort. At Brynmawr, housing followed the lines of mineral tramways already in place, which in effect provided the town with a ready-made street plan. In either case, this building of houses on wasteground was not an innovation: the process of encroachment, or squatting, had taken place in the eighteenth century under pressure of rising population⁴. It also occurred during the nineteenth century as settlements were established on moorland alongside mines and quarries. The ancient custom of squatting by building a *ty unnos* is probably evident in the 'turff houses' mentioned in the 1891 census for Llanelly Hill.

A lack of planning control, bad housing conditions, absence of sanitary provision, and so on, were found on Llanelly Hill, and elsewhere in the parish, in common with nearly all the early ironworking settlements. It was a distinctive feature of the settlements in Llanelly parish that they failed to develop into fully formed townships. The reasons for this were probably geographical and economic. Firstly, the narrow Clydach Gorge did not afford space for settlements to grow, and the moorland plateau of Llanelly Hill was too remote and inaccessible. Secondly, the local iron

⁴ Trefor M. Owen, *The Customs and Traditions of Wales*, (University of Wales Press, 1991), pp. 26, 61-2.

industry failed in the 1860s and 70s, and was not fully replaced by the coal mining industry as an alternative. The one notable exception to this was Brynmawr, whose geographical location, as noted earlier, was more favourable.

One important consequence of this failure to develop lay in the field of public health. Whereas the loosely scattered settlements of Llanelly Hill avoided the overcrowded living conditions of bigger urban areas, they came to lack the civic administration necessary to effect public health improvements. Descriptions of Brynmawr in the first half of the nineteenth century portray appalling living conditions, but the town was able to establish a Board of Health in 1851 in response to those problems. The end result was that, in 1872, deaths from enteric fever in the town were running at only half those of the rest of the parish. Settlements such as Llanelly Hill were largely by-passed by urban improvements. As late as 1893, drinking water on Llanelly Hill was deemed unfit for human consumption, and residents later complained to the local Highways Board of a lack of adequate roads. It is significant that, when dealing with an outbreak of smallpox in 1873, the Local Government Board was able to communicate with Boards of Health at Brynmawr and Blaenavon, but found itself in communication with parish vestries at Llanelly, Llangynidr and Llangattock.

The Crickhowell Registration District, containing the industrial parishes of south Breconshire, had the highest mortality rate of any Welsh Registration District, except for Merthyr⁵. The death rate at Merthyr was on a par with Manchester, Liverpool, and the East End of London. On the other hand, infant and general mortality rates in the Abergavenny area were lower than certain cities in the English Midlands over the period 1851-60, and this was especially so in relation to infant death rates. Comparatively low infant mortality rates around Abergavenny were thought to be due to the fact that their mothers did not work outside the home,

⁵ References to mortality rates here are to the mean figure over the period 1841-60: see I.G. Jones, *Mid-Victorian Wales: the Observers and the Observed*, (University of Wales Press, 1992), p.26,

whereas those in the Midlands did⁶. If this is so, and there seems to be no good reason to doubt it, then the removal of women from the workplace was of more significance than a mere change in the occupational structure.

Against this, it has to be said that the South Wales mining communities had relatively high death rates from certain types of disease caused by the cold, damp climate of the area, and the dangers to health presented by mining as an occupation. Deaths from lung diseases in the Merthyr Tydfil and Abergavenny areas were twice the standard rate. The age structure of the workforce on Llanelly Hill helps illustrate the toll mining took on the health, whether through fatalities or accidents, or through pulmonary and lung diseases. Over half of all iron and coal miners in 1851 were in their twenties and thirties, with a noticeable decline in numbers thereafter. This was partly due to the in-migration of young males, but the overall age structure of the Llanelly Hill workforce is probably reasonably typical, as it mirrors closely the findings of the Children's Employment Commission in 1842: that miners' health often began to fail in their forties and fifties, and that many died before the age of sixty.

Religion

The Nonconformity of nineteenth century Llanelly parish was determined by the seventeenth century Puritanism that preceded it. The establishment of Baptist and Independent causes in the Abergavenny and Brecon areas from the 1630s led to the dominance of those two sects in the locality. The Usk valley was an important factor in the spread of early Dissent from England, and the fact that the Usk ran through Llanelly parish was a huge influence on the religious persuasions of later inhabitants. The situation was the same in the industrial parts of Monmouthshire, where Dissenting sects established in the seventeenth century came to dominate the nineteenth century industrial communities⁷. These early denominations were not

⁶ 4th Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, 1861, PP, 1862, XXII, Appendix IV, Report on the excessive Mortality of Young Children among certain Manufacturing Populations, p.190

⁷ I.G. Jones, *The Valleys in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, (Lecture to the Standing Conference on the History of the South Wales Valleys, 1981), p.23

bound by the centuries old structures and ingrained attitudes of the Established Church, and their proactive, evangelising methods amongst the new industrial communities in the parish were in marked contrast to the lack of an Anglican response to the changing social conditions. It was not until the early 1840s that the Church made any move to cater for the needs of the industrial settlements in the parish. The main difficulty was that the parish church, geared to the needs of a thinly scattered rural population, now found itself isolated from the new centres of population, which had grown up some distance away. This problem was common to other parishes, both in the South Wales iron district, and elsewhere, for example, in the large forestry parishes in England. There was, too, a clear social divide between the working people who attended chapel, and the yeomen farmers and retired well-to-dos who made up the congregations at the parish church.

Despite this, relations between Nonconformists and Anglicans in the parish seem to have been cordial. The parish church was popular for Nonconformist burials, and some co-operation between the two seems to have existed.

With only two chapels in 1851 (though a third was added later) the provision of religious accommodation on Llanelly Hill was at a fairly low level. Only a third of the population could be accommodated. Attendances at religious service were restricted by this comparative lack of provision, and the attendance rate at services on Llanelly Hill on Census Sunday, was around 73. Accommodation and attendance rates for the parish, however, were high at 87 and 105 respectively, and compared favourably with more rural parts of the county, as represented by the Registration Districts of Builth, Hay, and Brecknock. When compared with the general attendance rates discussed by Mills, and the accommodation and attendance rates of many English counties, it becomes clear that, for Llanelly parish at least, industrialisation had not undermined organised religion. The position at mid-century was quite the reverse: the growth in population in the industrial communities had led to the building of over twenty chapels in the parish in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was when local industry began to decline that the rate of chapel building tailed off. The

contribution of these chapels, not only to the religious life of the community, but to its cultural and educational life, was an important one.

There was great diversity in religious life in terms of the numbers of denominations represented. Though the indigenous sects of Baptists and Independents quickly established a hegemony, which they were to maintain throughout the nineteenth century, in-migrant peoples brought their own religion with them. Roots of in-migration can be traced in the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists arriving from the rural uplands of Breconshire, the English speaking Baptists and Wesleyan Methodists from the English border counties, and, in the case of Brynmawr, the Roman Catholicism of Irish migrants, the Congregationalism of the Scots, and the synagogue of the Jewish shopkeeping class.

A comparison of the data available for Beersheba Baptist chapel on Llanelly Hill for 1851 and 1905 shows the chapel in a position of strength in 1905, equal to, if not greater than, its position in 1851. The comparison can only be an approximate one, since the precise nature of the data collected for those two years differs. One basis of direct comparison is available, and this shows that Beersheba's Sunday School was better attended in 1851 than in 1905, even though the population was smaller and compulsory elementary education had by now been introduced. However, Beersheba's strength in 1905 was the result of a religious revival occurring in Wales in the years 1903-5, and there is no easy way of knowing what the position would have been if it were not for that revival. The two other chapels on Llanelly Hill had been rebuilt or extended during the revival, which shows the impact the revival had there. Beersheba's membership had fluctuated over the course of the century, most notably with the cholera epidemic of 1847-8, the closure of the Clydach works in 1861, and a period of 5 years without a Pastor in the 1880s. It seems likely that religion remained an important part of people's lives in the latter stages of the century: religion took a 'fair hold' of Llanelly Hill in 1887⁸, and a Nonconformist chapel and a church mission

⁸ William Luther, *Llanelly Hill and its Antiquities*, p.7

room had been added since 1851. From a national perspective, membership of the four main Nonconformist denominations in Wales rose steadily in each year between 1861 to 1903, before rising sharply with the religious revival, but declining continuously after the First World War. Secularisation was a feature of the twentieth century rather than the nineteenth.

The Clydach Iron Company assisted in the provision of places of worship for its workers. This may have been altruistic, or because it was thought that religion would have a 'civilising' influence on a sometimes disorderly populace. There is no evidence on the last point, one way or the other. But in the long term, Nonconformist religion fostered an independence of mind and forged a working class leadership. In any event, there were large sections of the population who remained unmoved by religious teaching.

Education

Religion was closely involved with education, most obviously through the Sunday School movement and the Circulating Schools of the eighteenth century. When the latter movement ended, the resulting vacuum was poorly filled by an assortment of dame and day schools, often staffed by the elderly and the disabled: a factor which says much for the standards of instruction provided.

The Sunday School movement spread from North to South Wales by way of migration. It is thus significant that the first Sunday School in Llanelly parish was run by an ironstone mason from North Wales. The movement was particularly important in Wales where, in 1851, three times as many people attended Sunday Schools as day schools. A similar situation applied to Llanelly parish, where at the time of the 1847 Education Commission, 32% of the population attended Nonconformist Sunday Schools, compared with only 9% at Day Schools (at 1.5% at the Church Sunday School). The reasons for the popularity of Sunday Schools are probably several: Nonconformist Sunday Schools used Welsh, catered for adults as well as children, and no loss of wages was incurred by attending.

It was during the 1830s that the South Wales area suffered a series of major disturbances, which caused various commissions of inquiry to report on the social ills of the district. It was estimated at this time that some 70% of children who should have been attending a day school did not do so. Unrest in the South Wales district culminated in the 1839 Chartist Rising, which brought the problems of the area sharply into focus. The recommendations of the various reports produced, was that educational provision should be increased, and hence the 1840s saw a steep rise in the provision of works schools, including the Clydach works school in 1842. Unlike the case with religion, there is direct evidence that the authors of the reports saw education as a means of bringing the population under control.

Llanelly parish at the time of the 1847 Commission presented a fairly typical picture, with low school attendances, and a population portrayed as intemperate, largely illiterate, and lacking in morals. The blame for this state of affairs was laid partly at the door of the Welsh language and its Nonconformist religious connections. The shortcomings were remedied to an extent by the provision of additional schools in the 1840s, and in the 1850s and 60s, but the establishment of a Board School on Llanelly Hill in 1871 – almost immediately following Forster's Education Act - suggests an urgent need for further educational provision.

In practice, it is difficult to gauge with any accuracy the numbers of children attending day schools, firstly because their attendance alternated with spells of employment, but secondly because the census returns for Llanelly parish seem to be innaccurate: a problem which was to some extent general⁹. The numbers of scholars recorded on Llanelly Hill are exceptionally low, even when compared with urbanised areas in the Midlands identified by Coleman as tending to have an incidence of schooling lower than the national average¹⁰. It seems almost certain that the number of scholars in the 1851 and 1891 census returns were misrepresented. The question then

⁹ B. Coleman, 'The Incidence of Education in Mid-Century', in Wrigley (Ed.), *Nineteenth Century Society*, p. 402

¹⁰ Coleman, pp. 399-400

remains as to what degree scholars went unrecorded: in other words, how inaccurate was the census? This is impossible to state with any certainty. It seems safe to say that the census was probably nearer the mark in 1851 than in 1891, as the widespread failure of children to attend school in mid-century is well documented by the Children's' Employment Commission (1842) and the Education Commission (1847). By 1891, however, school attendance was compulsory at an elementary level, and it is difficult to imagine children staying away from school in anything like the numbers suggested by the census. The only safe conclusions to be drawn are that school attendance was low in 1851, though probably not as low as that recorded by the census, but that there must be serious inaccuracies in relation to the 1891 census.

Language

Both education and religion in turn had a bearing on the question of language: many Nonconformist chapels held services in Welsh, and provided Welsh speaking Sunday Schools, but from the 1870s, the use of English in Board Schools became compulsory. Before census statistics became available, the use of language in religious service is one of the best sources for measuring linguistic patterns.

Breconshire was subject to two conflicting influences in the area of language use. It fell within a bilingual border zone, experiencing the pressure of the English language moving in from the east, especially through the important communication routes of the river valleys, but buttressed in its use of Welsh by the strongly Welsh speaking counties to the immediate west. Llanelly parish lay on the Usk Valley and should have been particularly vulnerable to anglicising influences. The nearby town of Abergavenny, also in the Usk Valley, had for example abandoned all use of Welsh in its religious services by 1771. It was the English language which ultimately triumphed in Breconshire: Pryce has said that the county was Welsh speaking in 1801, bilingual in 1851, and substantially anglicised by 1881¹¹.

¹¹ W.T.R. Pryce, 'Wales as a Culture Region: Patterns of Change 1750-1971', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 229-61, quoted in J. Aitchison and H. Carter, *A Geography of the Welsh Language, 1961-1991*, (University of Wales Press, 1994), p.37

Despite – or perhaps because of - the diminishing importance of the Welsh language in Abergavenny, the town became something of a cultural centre for a Welsh renaissance in the 1830s and 40s, with its *Cymreigyddion* society, and its flourishing *eisteddfodau*. These cultural endeavours would have enhanced the use of Welsh, and may have been a reaction to the weakening in status of the language, but these institutions were probably patronised mainly by a middle-class element. In some sense, these questions are not of the greatest importance, because, in the 1830s and 40s, Welsh was almost certainly widely used in the industrial communities. Although industrialisation had brought about an influx of English speaking migrants to Llanelly parish, this was outweighed to begin with by the inward migration of Welsh speaking people from the uplands of rural Breconshire. Hence it was the middle-class of Abergavenny who were losing their native tongue, and who most needed to bolster it, not the working people of the industrial settlements.

That, at least, was the position during the 1830s and 40s, and earlier, but the eventual history of the Welsh language on the coalfield was one of decline. Its retreat has been measured by a study of the language used by Baptist chapels in their religious services¹². Before 1860, Welsh was predominant, there being very few English speaking Baptist chapels; between 1860 and 1889, English speaking chapels approached a kind of parity with those using Welsh; from 1890 onwards, the Baptist chapels in the eastern section of the coalfield were overwhelmingly English speaking, with Welsh chapels confined to the western section. The evidence for Llanelly parish shows that the 1870s formed a watershed, since it was mainly in that decade that the chapels in the parish relinquished their use of Welsh in favour of conducting services in English. The immediate influences were probably twofold: the opening of the Abergavenny to Merthyr railway in the early 1860s, which opened the area further to English influence, and the advent of the Board School system from the early 1870s, which insisted on English as the educational medium.

¹² P.N. Jones, 'Baptist Chapels as an index of cultural transition in the South Wales coalfield before 1914', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 2, 4, (1976), 347-360

The establishment of Thomas Price's Welsh speaking school on Llanelly Hill in the 1820s, and the difficulties encountered by a non-Welsh speaking schoolmaster at the Clydach works school in the late 1840s, suggests that Welsh was widely spoken in the industrial communities of Llanelly parish at that time. An English speaking Baptist chapel was built near Llanelly Hill as early as 1850, however, and by the late 1880s, the Welsh language was spoken most widely amongst the elderly on Llanelly Hill, with younger people most often using English. This was significant, as it was of course amongst the young that the future of any language lay. So, by 1891, when the census first collected statistics on the use of language, 54% of the Welsh population were able to speak Welsh, but the figure for Llanelly Hill was only 40%. This was still considerably higher than Monmouthshire, the most extensively anglicised of any Welsh county, where only 15% could speak Welsh in 1891, but was much weaker than in Merthyr Tydfil, 68% of whose population could speak Welsh. The use of language was not distributed evenly, however. The evidence was that Welsh was more widely spoken in the industrial settlements than the agricultural, due principally to the dense concentrations in high numbers of Welsh speaking people (Merthyr Tydfil is the prime example of this). That state of affairs was true of Monmouthshire in 1891, and had been true of Llanelly parish in 1847 (at the time of the Education Commission). By 1891, the fate of the Welsh language had effectively been sealed on Llanelly Hill, where only 10% of the population were monoglot Welsh, compared with 60% being monoglot English, and some 30% bilingual. Those who were bilingual would most often use English, simply because there were six times as many English as Welsh monoglots. The implications of this for the future use of language are obvious.

Politics and Protest

By the 1830s and early 1840s, those in authority had become concerned with certain aspects of life in the ironbelt. Drunkenness was a problem because there were few recreational facilities, and because the ironworking communities contained high proportions of young men earning relatively high wages. Drunkenness was probably

linked to the petty offending found in these communities, though statistics of offences coming before local Magistrates in 1845-6 suggest that serious offending was less frequent than in agricultural areas¹³.

There was a direct link between drunkenness and wage levels. A series of reports on the South Wales area in the 1840s commented on the extent of drunkenness and a 'deep and reckless sensuality'. These reports attributed the increase in intemperate habits with the recovery of wage levels in the 1840s. The enquiries which gave rise to them had been set up in response to the violence of the 1830s, a decade which had witnessed two serious insurrections on the coalfield.

Disputes between worker and employer at Llanelly parish dated back to the 1790s, and workers in the parish had been involved in the major strike of 1816. The background to industrial unrest was often a recession in the iron industry and the fall of wages. In the 1820s and 30s, the experiences of Llanelly parish were common to the Monmouthshire irontowns, and illustrate very well the methods of the Scotch Cattle. In later years, as the parish became something of an industrial backwater, the evidence of industrial conflict relates increasingly to Brynmawr, with its stratified union movement.

There was little or no political voice for the industrial communities at the time the Scotch Cattle were at the height of their influence, nor would there be for some considerable time to come. Political representation in Breconshire was in the hands of a small number of landed families, and family allegiances almost certainly counted for more, at this time, than any purely political issue, save perhaps the question of repeal of the Corn Laws, which seems to have aroused feelings amongst the limited electorate of a substantially rural county. The 1832 Reform Act did little to extend the Breconshire franchise, but the 1867 Act increased the county electorate by 51%. It was the 1884 Act which went furthest, however, and brought about a 127% rise in electors. The 1867 Act had had a noticeable impact on urban areas, such as Merthyr

¹³ Offences before Magistrates, Crickhowell Hundred, 1845-6, published in *The Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, PP, 1847, XXVII, Part II, pp. 62-3.

Tydfil, where the greatly increased electorate returned a popular candidate at the 1868 election, ahead of the old industrialist faction. The situation was otherwise for Llanelly parish where, even after the 1867 Act, the electorate on Llanelly Hill was only 14 in 1871, rising to 23 by 1879, though Breconshire returned its first Liberal MP in the mid 1870s, and the extended electorate after the 1884 Act guaranteed the return of a Liberal Member through the remainder of the century.

Dissatisfaction with the limited extent of reform in 1832 gave rise to the Chartist movement, which features large in nineteenth century Welsh history due to the 1839 Chartist March on Newport. There can be little doubt that Chartism gained a foothold locally, especially amongst the tradespeople of Brynmawr, and through having a prominent Welsh Chartist leader in Zephaniah Williams at Nantyglo. There was also a Chartist lodge at the Clydach Ironworks. However, Chartism seems to have been most popular amongst the artisan class - a kind of intelligentsia of publicans and retail tradesmen. It did garner mass popular support for the Newport rising, but it is uncertain as to how far the principles of Chartism took root with the industrial worker, as opposed to the simple and more direct appeal of mass action. Chartism died away after the failure of the Newport rising, though it enjoyed something of a revival in the 1840s, and by the 1860s the Liberation Society found the Welsh to be politically apathetic.

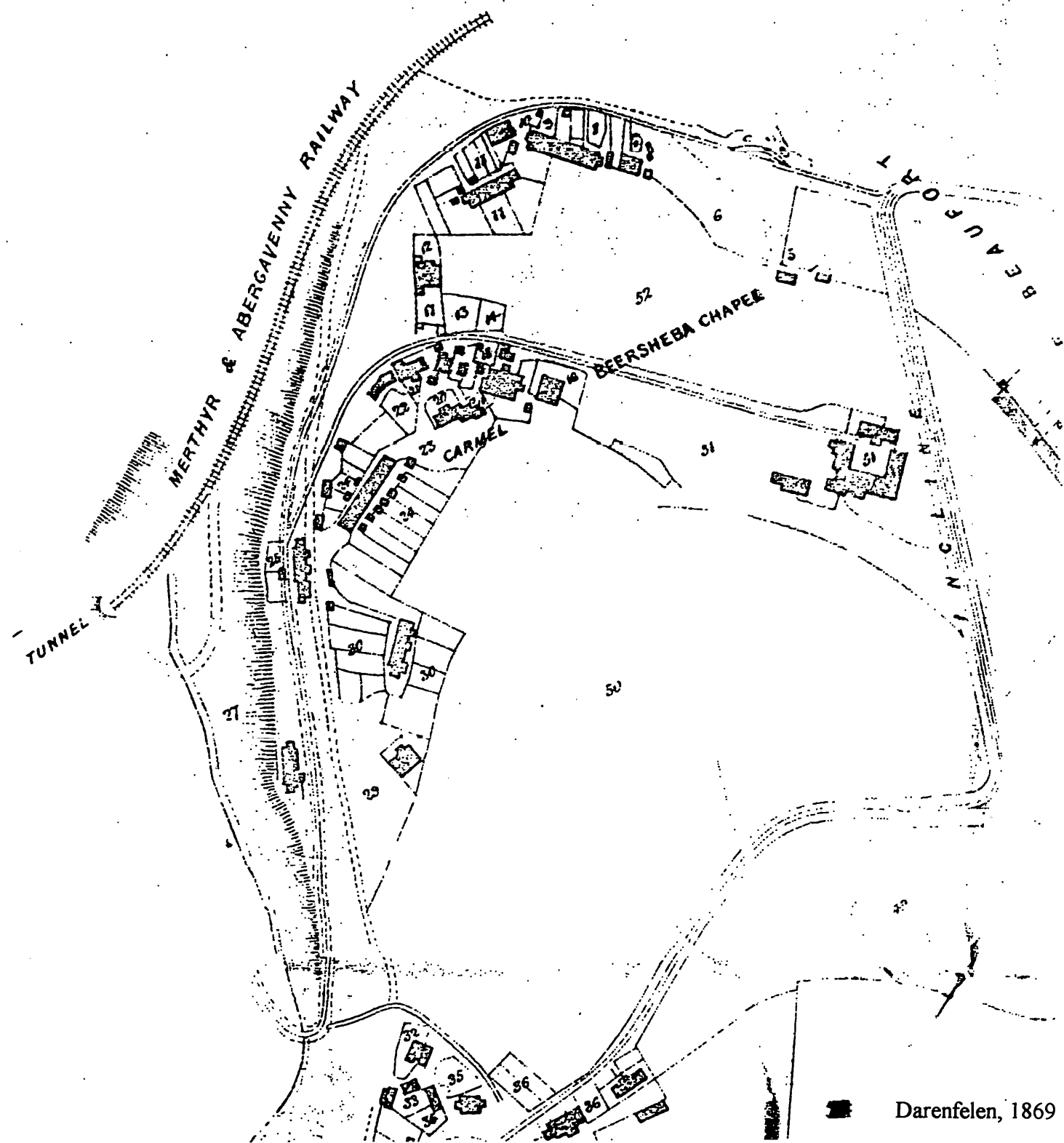
This study has aimed to carry through, in some measure, the goal of the local historian to chart the origins, growth and decline of a local community. Although the experiences of a place like Llanelly parish may seem unimportant, in practice, the histories of local communities are vital in understanding the larger picture, as well as being informative and worth preserving in their own right. Whilst the material to write such local histories exists, they deserve to be written, not only for the valuable contribution they can make to historical study, but to better understand the way in which their past has helped shape the present. Llanelly parish everywhere bears the imprint of an industry which lasted only sixty years, and which disappeared a century

and a half ago. Few today are aware of it. For that reason alone, though there are many others, the story of that industry seems worth recording.

Appendix I – Extracts from Conveyance Plan, 1869

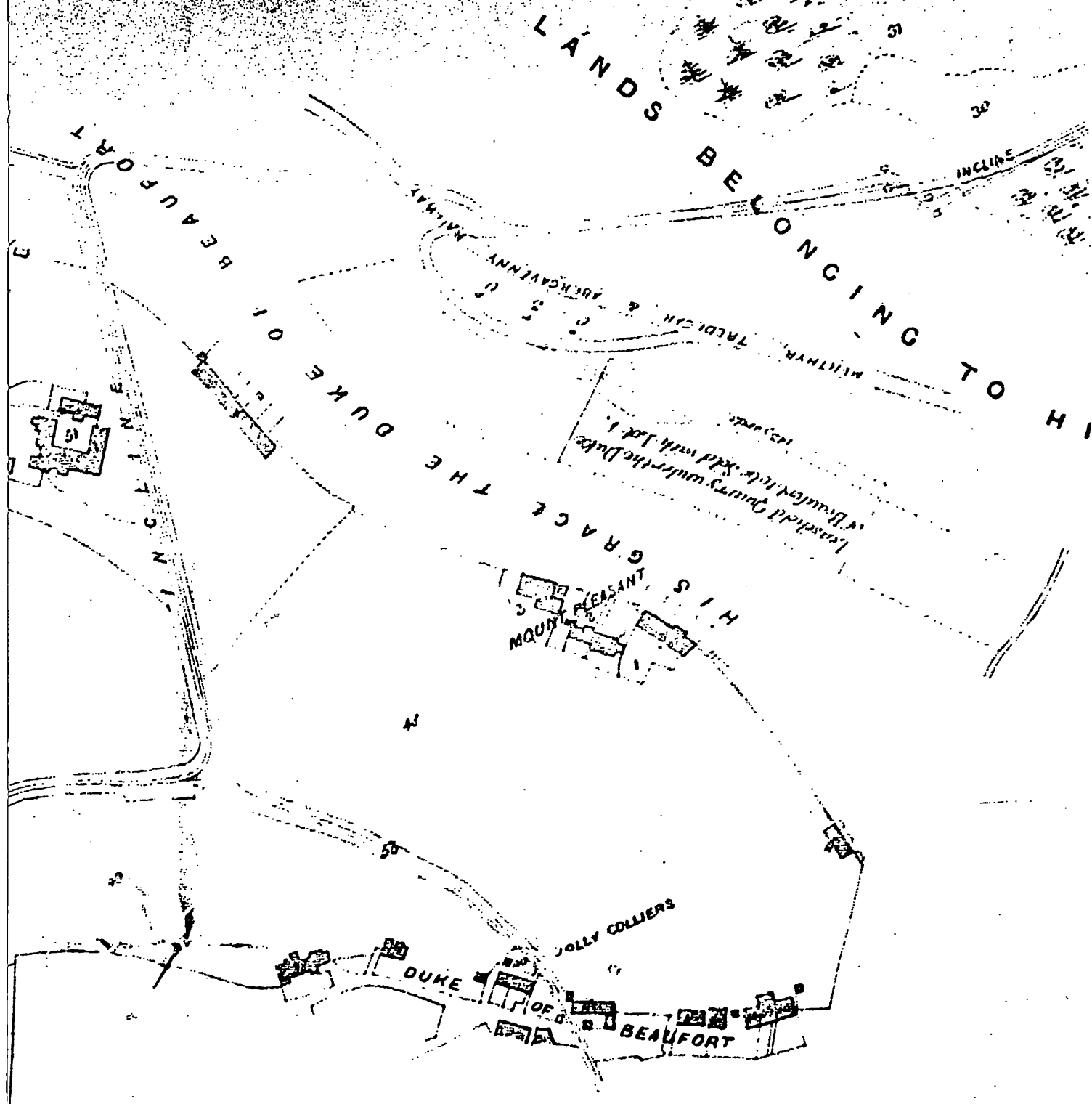
Extracts from plan to conveyance of 4th May 1869, New Clydach Sheet and Bar Iron Company to John Jayne, (Scale: 3 chains to 1 inch) (Gwent CRO, D/591.3.246)

1. Darenfelen, Llanelly Hill
2. Part of Llamarch, Llanelly Hill
3. Waun Lapra, Mount Pleasant, and Penfyddlwn, Llanelly Hill

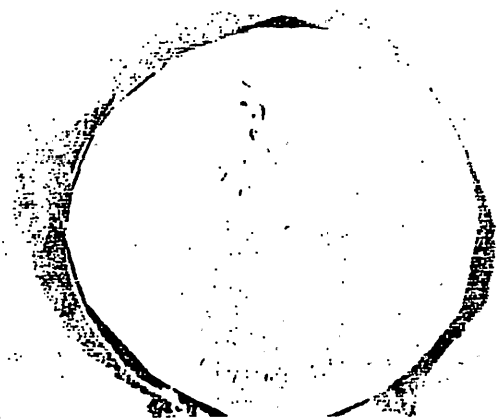




Lower part of Llamarch, 1869



Waun Lapra, Mount Pleasant and Penfyddlwn, 1869



Appendix II - Extracts from Ordnance Survey, 1880

Scale 1:25,000

1. Darenfelen, Llanelly Hill
2. Llamarch, Llanelly Hill
3. Part of Clydach

Morint Pleasant

Periplus

School 987
100427

Beersheba Clippel
(Welsh Baptist)

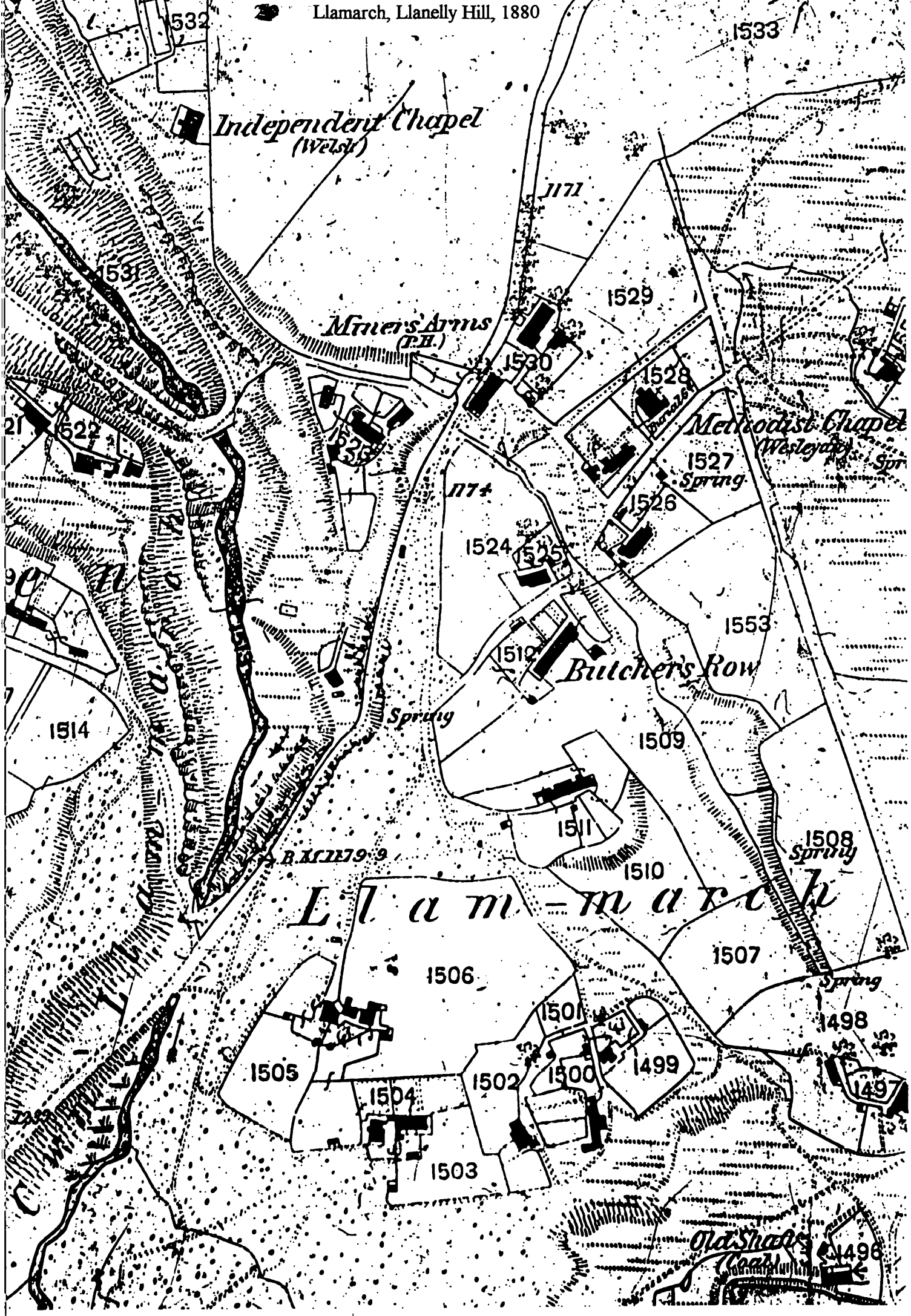
Daren-felen

Jolly Colliers
(PH)

Wann-lappi

1533

1535



Independent Chapel
(Welsk)

Miner's Arms
(P.H.)

Methodist Chapel
(Wesleyan)

Butcher's Row

Llamarch

1532

1533

1171

1529

1528

1527
Spring

1526

1524

1525

1553

1514

1512

Spring

1509

1511

1510

1508
Spring

1507

1506

1505

1501

1502

1500

1499

1498

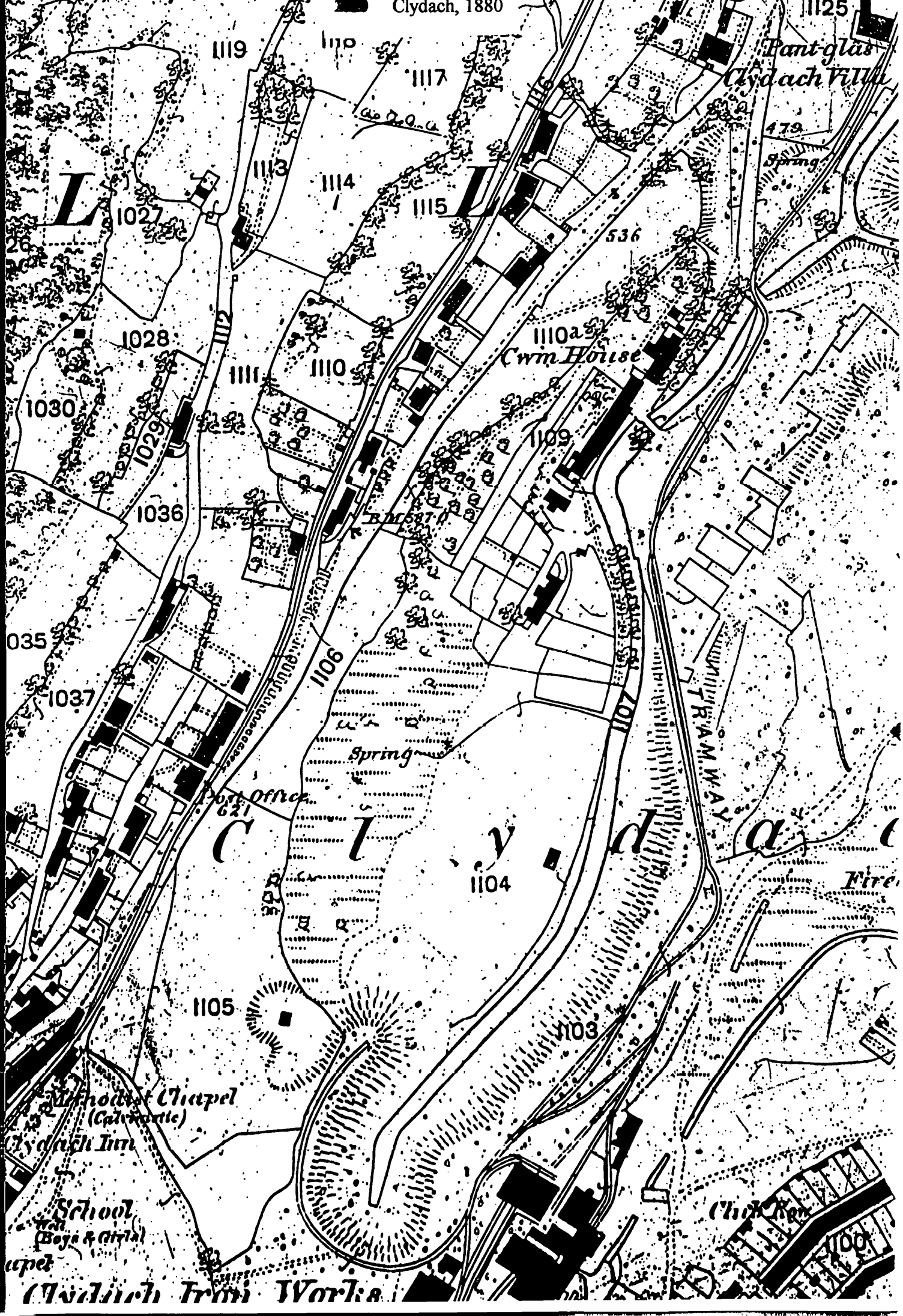
1497

1503

1504

Old Chapel
(Wesleyan)

1496



**Appendix III – Age and sex structure of the population,
Llanelly Hill, 1851 and 1891**

1851

Age group	Male		Female		Total %
	No.	%	No.	%	
Children (0-14)	337	18.50	332	18.22	36.72
Young Adults (15-29)	294	16.14	241	13.23	29.37
Early Middle Age (30-44)	190	10.43	148	8.12	18.55
Later Middle Age (45-59)	96	5.27	92	5.05	10.32
Elderly (60+)	41	2.25	51	2.80	5.05
Total	958	52.59	864	47.42	100.01

Source: 1851 census, PRO (HO/107/2490)

1891

Age group	Male		Female		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
Children (0-14)	252	21.67	210	18.13	39.8
Young Adults (15-29)	181	15.63	133	11.48	27.11
Early Middle Age (30-44)	96	8.29	81	6.99	15.28
Later Middle Age (45-59)	73	6.30	61	5.27	11.57
Elderly (60+)	36	3.11	36	3.11	6.22
Total	637	55.00	521	44.98	99.98

Source: 1891 Census, PRO (RG/12/4576)

Appendix IV - Trade directory listings of public houses, 1844 and 1858

BRYNMAWR	REMAINDER OF PARISH
<i>Alma Inn</i>	Beaufort Arms
<i>Bear Inn</i>	<i>Belle Vue</i>
Beaufort Arms	Blackrock
Bee Hive	Brittania
<i>Black Lion</i>	<i>Castle</i>
<i>Bridge Inn</i>	Clydach Arms
Brittania	<i>Clydach Inn</i>
<i>Bryn Cottage Inn</i>	Crown †
Cambrian	<i>Crown & Sceptre</i>
Castle	<i>Five Bells</i>
<i>Clarence Inn</i>	Forge Hammer‡
Colliers' Arms	<i>George Inn</i>
Firemen's Arms	Greyhound
Greyhound	Horseshoe
Griffin Inn*	<i>Navigation Inn</i>
Heathcock	<i>Rising Sun</i>
<i>King David</i>	Rock & Fountain
King's Head*	Royal Oak
<i>King William IV</i>	Six Bells
<i>Mitre Hotel*</i>	
Mount Pleasant	
<i>New Inn</i>	
Prince of Wales	
<i>Red Lion</i>	
Rising Sun	
<i>Salutation</i>	
<i>Shoulder of Mutton</i>	
Upper Lion	
White Lion	

Public houses listed 1844

Public houses listed 1844 and 1858

Public houses listed 1858

* denotes Brynmawr coaching inn

† Later renamed Drum & Monkey

‡ Also mentioned in tithe commutation agreement, 1839

The following public houses appear in other sources, but are not listed in any trade directories:

Firemans Arms, Clydach, (OS 1880)

Masons Arms, Aberclydach (mentioned in tithe commutation agreement, 1839)

Miners Arms, Llamarch, Llanelly Hill (OS 1880)

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[Abbreviations: CRO = County Record Office; NLW = National Library of Wales; PP = Parliamentary Papers; PRO = Public Record Office]

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